



## Draft Purpose and Need Statement

The study area for the Central Polk Parkway is entirely within Polk County, and the study limits extend from S.R. 60 east of Bartow, northwesterly to the Polk Parkway (S.R. 570) and from S.R. 60 east of Bartow, northerly to Interstate 4 (I-4) near the Polk/Osceola County Line. The Central Polk Parkway, from S.R. 60 east of Bartow to the Polk Parkway (S.R. 570), is included in the Polk Transportation Planning Organization's (TPO's) *2030 Transportation Improvement Program (TRIP)* as a cost feasible project, assumed to be funded through toll revenue. An extension of the Central Polk Parkway east to S.R. 60 and U.S. 27 in the vicinity of Lake Wales is listed as an unfunded need in the Polk TPO *2030 TRIP Highway Needs Plan*. It should be noted that the portion of the study corridor between S.R. 60 and I-4 is not currently identified in the Polk TPO's 2030 TRIP; however, coordination with the Polk TPO is underway. The Transportation Element of the *Polk County Comprehensive Plan* was amended in 2007 to include the portion of the Central Polk Parkway from S.R. 60 in Bartow to the Polk Parkway (S.R. 570).

Polk County is uniquely positioned between two well defined regions, the Tampa Bay region on the west and the Central Florida region around Orlando on the east, and connected by the I-4 corridor. Over the past few decades, each of these regions has continued to grow, with growth increasingly crossing county boundaries and creating multi-county economic regions. These regions are anticipated to expand over the next few decades, with the Tampa Bay and greater Orlando areas growing together into one economic region along the I-4 or "High-Tech Corridor". As emphasized in the *2025 Florida Transportation Plan*, transportation needs in these regions will continue to be focused around congestion relief and a desire for additional modal options (Florida Department of Transportation, November 2006). Within the region that reaches from Tampa-St. Petersburg across Polk County and into the greater Orlando area, transportation choices that are being planned include high speed rail, commuter rail, and bus rapid transit. As a part of the PD&E Study for Central Polk Parkway, coordination with transit and local government officials will occur in order to determine what multi-modal accommodations will be studied and evaluated as part of the project alternatives.

The *Polk TPO's 2030 TRIP* includes a discussion of 25-year transportation needs and specifically references the *Central Polk Travel Study* completed in June 2005. This was conducted as a stand-alone study and as a subset of the overall *2030 TRIP* update process. The study provided valuable insights and recommendations that were incorporated into the *2030 TRIP* transportation needs and cost-feasible plans. According to the findings of

the *Central Polk Travel Study*, there would need to be a combination of both new roadways and widening of existing roadways to meet the forecast traffic demands of 2030. The study identified the Central Polk Parkway as a new toll facility and an important piece in the central Polk County transportation network. Based on available 2030 average annual daily traffic (AADT) forecasts, the following improvements would likely be recommended if the Central Polk Parkway were not included in the *2030 TRIP Transportation Needs Plan*:

- Six-laning of S.R. 60 from Bartow to Lake Wales,
- Four-laning of Rifle Range Road north of S.R. 60,
- Four-laning of proposed Bartow Connector, from U.S. 17 to S.R. 60, and
- Six-laning of Spirit Lake Road from U.S. 17 to Recker Highway and/or four-laning of Recker Highway from Spirit Lake Road to U.S. 17.

The Central Polk Parkway would be a vital link in Polk County's future transportation system, connecting the existing Polk Parkway (S.R. 570) with eastern Polk County and beyond and providing congestion relief to several other corridors in central Polk County.

As discussed in the *East Polk County 2030 Network Needs Study* (Polk TPO, February 2009), it is important to preserve the functionality of U.S. 27 and S.R. 17 by providing parallel routes to alleviate congestion. Continuous north-south corridors parallel to U.S. 27 and S.R. 17 are a primary need, as these two existing facilities are policy or physically constrained and would be difficult to widen. It is important to note that U.S. 27 was recently widened to six lanes throughout the majority of the study area.

The purpose of the Central Polk Parkway study is to identify an environmentally-sensitive preferred alternative for a new four-lane limited access highway that will provide an additional north-south facility to enhance mobility and increase accessibility on the regional roadway network and also improve emergency evacuation and response times. The addition of another north-south facility to the network will reduce traffic congestion, including truck traffic, on several corridors in central Polk County, particularly parallel facilities such as U.S. 98, U.S. 17, and U.S. 27. The Central Polk Parkway is anticipated to support the increased travel demands expected from the continued residential and employment growth projected within the County and throughout the entire region. These needs are further emphasized in the *Central Florida Regional Growth Vision* (Central Florida MPO Alliance, August 2007) and the *Draft Gateway Area Long Term Vision* (Polk County, 2009). The preferred alternative must be consistent with meeting the following needs that have been identified: (1) Improve connectivity to the regional transportation network; (2) Enhance freight mobility and economic competitiveness; (3) Improve emergency evacuation capabilities; and (4) Accommodate future population and growth.

The following sections discuss the considerations for the project's Purpose and Need in greater detail.

## **Western Corridor (S.R. 60 to Polk Parkway (S.R. 570))**

- **Improve Mobility and Connectivity within the Regional Transportation Network**

The Western Corridor of the Central Polk Parkway will serve as a vital link in Polk County's future transportation system and the regional transportation network. According to the Central Florida Development Council (November 2009), there are approximately 8.6 million residents and a workforce of 3.4 million within a 100-mile radius of Polk County. Recent census data indicates that many residents throughout Polk County work in either Tampa or Orlando and commute to those areas two or three days a week. This facility will improve connections to other major east-west (i.e. Polk Parkway, I-4, S.R. 60) and north-south (i.e. U.S. 98, I-75) transportation corridors, as well as residential and employment centers and other regional destinations in Polk County and the Tampa Bay region. The Central Polk Parkway will provide additional connections to the local roadway network and will also connect to a number of facilities that are designated as part of the Strategic Intermodal System (SIS). The SIS is a statewide network of highways, railways, waterways, and transportation hubs that handle the bulk of Florida's passenger and freight traffic. Highways that are designated as part of the SIS provide for movement of goods and people at high speeds and high traffic volumes. S.R. 60 and I-4, which are both part of the SIS, provide coast to coast traffic movement across central Florida, while SIS facilities such as U.S. 98 and I-75, provide north-south movement through the state and beyond. The addition of the Central Polk Parkway connecting these regional roadways would not only relieve congestion by distributing traffic, but allow for better connectivity, thereby enhancing mobility in Polk County and West Central Florida.

- **Enhance Freight Mobility and Economic Competitiveness**

Polk County is nationally recognized as a distribution center for some of the nation's largest retailers (Central Florida Development Council, November 2009). The region is continuing to attract national and regional developers because of its geographic location and affordability. Consistent with the *Central Florida Regional Growth Vision* (Central Florida MPO Alliance, August 2007), the Western Corridor of the Central Polk Parkway will provide access to regional industrial, manufacturing, freight distribution, and transportation facilities in central Polk County and to global markets within the Tampa Bay region. The CSX Intermodal Logistics Center has been approved and will be located within the proposed Central Polk Parkway study area in southern Winter Haven. The proposed intermodal site entrance is approximately a half-mile east of C.R. 655 (Rifle Range Road) and two miles north of S.R. 60. Based on CSX estimates, the intermodal center will add 750 trucks daily to the area roadway network. Based on these projections, an additional north-south facility connecting S.R. 60 (which is to be the primary access route for the intermodal center) with the Polk Parkway, I-4, and I-75, will help distribute the heavy volume of truck traffic moving to the interstate system. This project will improve the circulation of freight and goods, providing access to local agricultural and ranching operations,

as well as to freight activity centers located in central Florida, and the Port of Tampa to the west.

- **Improve Emergency Evacuation Capabilities**

The Western Corridor of the Central Polk Parkway will connect to other major arterials designated on the state evacuation route network, such as S.R. 60, U.S. 17, U.S. 98, Polk Parkway (S.R. 570), and I-4 in Polk County. Recent hurricane seasons have reinforced the need for improved evacuation routes and additional route options to accommodate area residents and those fleeing from the west coast into inland counties such as Polk. The addition of this facility will provide another option to distribute traffic and also to provide connections to other regional and local routes; thereby increasing mobility during an emergency event and enhancing emergency response times.

- **Accommodate Future Population and Growth**

Based on the latest socioeconomic data from the Polk TPO, the total population of Polk County is projected to reach approximately 995,000 by 2035. The County's total employment is projected to approach 473,000 by 2035. Significant growth is anticipated in many areas of Polk County that will have an impact on the central Polk area. A number of these impacts will be related to new trips from growth in the central part of Polk County; however, others will come from the residents in western Polk County who will travel to or through the central Polk area. Also, the significant growth of trips coming from outside Polk County and traveling to or through areas of central Polk County will further increase demand on the roadway network in this area. Population is expected to increase by approximately 63 percent between now and 2025 and employment is expected to increase by 90 percent. Near the southern end of the Western Corridor is the Clear Springs Development of Regional Impact (DRI) which is a mix of residential and commercial uses which, when built out, is anticipated to double the current population of the City of Bartow. The additional capacity provided by the Central Polk Parkway will improve access and overall mobility within, and contiguous to, the western corridor where intense growth continues to occur and the level of congestion experienced by travelers continues to increase. Safety, emergency access, and truck access will all be enhanced through this facility.

## **Eastern Corridor (S.R. 60 to I-4)**

- **Improve Connectivity to the Regional Transportation Network**

The Eastern Corridor of the Central Polk Parkway will serve as a vital link in Polk County's future transportation system and the regional transportation network. According to the Central Florida Development Council (November 2009), there are approximately 8.6 million residents and a workforce of 3.4 million within a 100-mile radius of Polk County. Recent census data indicates that many residents throughout Polk County work in either Tampa or Orlando and commute to those areas two or three days a week. This facility will improve connections to other major east-west and north-south transportation corridors, as well as residential and employment centers and other regional activity centers and tourist destinations in Polk County and eastward to the Orlando Metropolitan area. The Central Polk Parkway will connect to a number of facilities that are designated as part of the Strategic Intermodal System (SIS), which is a statewide network of highways, railways, waterways, and transportation hubs that handle bulk of Florida's passenger and freight traffic. Highways that are designated as part of the SIS provide for movement of goods and people at high speeds and high traffic volumes. S.R. 60 and I-4, which are both part of the SIS, provide coast to coast traffic movement across Central Florida, while SIS facilities such as U.S. 27 and Florida's Turnpike provide north-south movement through the state and beyond. The addition of the Central Polk Parkway connecting these regional roadways would not only relieve congestion by distributing traffic, but allow for better connectivity, thereby enhancing mobility in Polk County and East Central Florida.

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- **Improve Emergency Evacuation Capabilities**

The Eastern Corridor of the Central Polk Parkway will connect to other major arterials designated on the state evacuation route network, such as S.R. 60, U.S. 27 and I-4 in Polk County. Recent hurricane seasons have reinforced the need for improved evacuation routes and additional route options to accommodate area residents and those fleeing from the west coast into inland counties such as Polk. The addition of this facility will provide another option to distribute traffic and also to provide connections to other regional and local routes; thereby increasing mobility during an emergency event and enhancing emergency response times.

- **Accommodate Future Population and Growth**

Based on the latest socioeconomic data from the Polk TPO, the total population of Polk County is projected to reach approximately 995,000 by 2035. The County's total employment is projected to approach 473,000 by 2035. Significant growth is anticipated in many areas of Polk County that will have an impact on the central Polk County area. A number of these impacts will be related to new trips from growth in the central part of Polk County; however, others will come from the residents in eastern Polk County who will travel to or through the central Polk County area. Also, the significant growth of trips coming from outside Polk County and traveling to or through areas of central Polk County, will further increase demand on the roadway network in this area. In the northern area of the Eastern Corridor is the Victor Posner City Center, which opened its initial phase in 2008 and will include residential and commercial/retail uses. The additional capacity provided by this facility will improve access and overall mobility within, and contiguous to, the eastern corridor where intense growth continues to occur and the level of congestion experienced by travelers continues to increase. Safety, emergency access, and truck access will all be enhanced through this facility.