

**RESOLUTION  
2021-151**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF LEVY COUNTY, FLORIDA, REQUESTING THE HONORABLE GOVERNOR RON DESANTIS, THE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND THE SECRETARY OF THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION DIRECT THE DEPARTMENT TO ADOPT AND IMPLEMENT A “NO BUILD” OPTION FOR ANY NORTHERN TURNPIKE EXTENSION CORRIDOR OR ROUTE THAT MAY BE PROPOSED THROUGH LEVY COUNTY, FLORIDA.**

**WHEREAS**, in its 2019 session, the Florida Legislature approved Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 7068 (Ch. 2019-43, Laws of Florida) and which created the Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance (“M-CORES”) Program within the Florida Department of Transportation (“FDOT”); and

**WHEREAS**, the stated purpose of the M-CORES Program was “to revitalize rural communities, encourage job creation, and provide regional connectivity while leveraging technology, enhancing quality of life and public safety, and protecting the environment and natural resources”; and

**WHEREAS**, the M-CORES Program proposed to extend certain transportation corridors within the State as tolled facilities and approved turnpike projects as part of the FDOT turnpike system in order to fulfill its stated purpose, which corridors included the Suncoast Connector and the Northern Turnpike Connector; and

**WHEREAS**, Levy County was included in the proposed extension areas for both the Suncoast Connector and the Northern Turnpike Connector; and

**WHEREAS**, the M-CORES Program was required to convene a Task Force for each corridor and to utilize “an inclusive, consensus-building mechanism” for design of the corridors, and each Task Force was to conduct public meetings and prepare a report to present to the Governor, the President of the Florida Senate, and the Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives with its evaluations on environmental and economic impacts, hurricane evacuation impacts and land use impacts of the Task Force’s respective corridor; and

**WHEREAS**, members of the Levy County Board of County Commissioners (the “Board”) were appointed to the Suncoast Connector Task Force and to the Northern Turnpike Connector Task Force and each appointed Commissioner diligently and in good faith participated in the Task Force proceedings which culminated in the issuance of Final Reports, including recommendations, for each corridor in November 2020;

**WHEREAS**, importantly, the legislation creating the M-CORES Program stated “to the maximum extent feasible, the department shall adhere to the recommendations of the task force created for each corridor in the design of the multiple modes of transportation and multiple types of infrastructure associated with the corridor”; and

**WHEREAS**, unfortunately, the process and timelines for design and construction for the proposed M-CORES corridor extensions did not provide adequate opportunity for public input through the Task Force public meetings on precise routes or construction design for the corridor extensions, since specific routes and designs were not established in time to be considered in the Task Force public meetings and reports; and

**WHEREAS**, with the passage of Senate Bill 100 in April 2021 (Ch. 2021-161, Laws of Florida), the Florida Legislature repealed the M-CORES Program legislation and in Section 12 of Ch. 2021-161, Laws of Florida, stated “The Legislature finds that the extension of the Florida Turnpike from its northerly terminus in Wildwood to a logical and appropriate terminus as determined by the Department of Transportation is in the strategic interest of the state. The department shall commence the project development and environmental phase of the extension and shall consider project configuration, alignment, cost, and schedule. The department shall prepare a report summarizing the status of the project development and environmental phase and, by December 31, 2022, submit the report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives”; and

**WHEREAS**, on November 12, 2021, each County Commissioner received an email (with attached project newsletter) from the FDOT that provided notice of upcoming Public Kickoff Meetings for the “Northern Turnpike Extension” Project (the “NTE Project”) which was described in the email as “early in the Planning phase and is following the FDOT’s Alternative Corridor Evaluation (ACE) process”; and

**WHEREAS**, nothing in the November 12<sup>th</sup> email or project newsletter informed the Board or interested residents that the FDOT had already mapped 4 preliminary alternative corridors for the NTE Project which could be viewed at <https://etdmpub.flas-etat.org/est/#> under Project #14480; and

**WHEREAS**, of significant concern to Levy County residents and the Board is that two of the corridors – one titled “Alternative Corridor North A” and another titled “Alternative Corridor North B” would bisect and have significant, negative impacts on Levy County; and

**WHEREAS**, as expressed by the Board in its Resolution 2020-022 adopted April 7, 2020, the residents of Levy County and the Board: (1) value the environmental assets in the County, including Manatee Springs, Fanning Springs, the Suwannee River and other water bodies, and the Goethe Forest, the Lower Suwannee Wildlife Refuge, the Cedar Key State Preserve and Waccasassa Bay State Preserve, all of which provide valuable habitat to plants and wildlife, and (2) value the agricultural assets in the County, including the expanses of rural land put to work in the agriculture industry, which land has been worked for generations by farmers and ranchers in the timber, peanut, watermelon, cattle and other agricultural commodities industries, without which Levy County would lose a valuable part of its culture and heritage; and

**WHEREAS**, as stated in its letter dated November 17, 2021 to the Governor, the Board recognizes that the growing population of Florida will require additions to critical transportation infrastructure within the State; however, the Board finds that the established routes of U.S. Highway 19/98 and U.S. Highway 41 which traverse Levy County meet and exceed current traffic flow needs and are well within acceptable levels of service to provide anticipated future needs for many years to come; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board supports upgrades to those existing roadways and notes that when making improvements to upgrade roadways, Section 339.66(3), Florida Statutes, requires that “[s]uch improvements must be made with the goal of enhancing the economic prosperity and preserving the character of the communities impacted by such improvements”; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board has already received considerable resident input expressing the desire for a “No Build” option for the Northern Turnpike Connector, due to concern over the disproportionate negative impacts on Levy County, its environmental assets, its agricultural assets, its rural neighborhoods, its ecotourism industry and its way of life; and

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Board of County Commissioners of Levy County, Florida, that:

1. In order to protect Levy County’s environmental and agricultural assets; its natural areas providing habitat, recreation and ecotourism; its rural lands and neighborhoods, and to preserve Levy County’s quality of life; the Board respectfully requests the Governor, the Florida Legislature, and the FDOT select the “No Build” option for the Northern Turnpike Extension at this time.

2. At such time as the Governor, the Florida Legislature, and the FDOT determine that the State must move forward with a new turnpike or other limited access roadway within Levy County, the Board respectfully requests that such project(s) provide meaningful public input processes and that the concerns of the Board and Levy County residents are addressed for any proposed corridor or route that would bisect Levy County.

3. To that end, the Board respectfully requests that a Levy County Commissioner or the Levy County Coordinator (or his designee) be appointed to serve on the Environmental Technical Advisory Team (ETAT) for the Northern Turnpike Extension Project or any another turnpike or limited access roadway project that is proposed within Levy County.

4. It is of critical concern to the Board, that any such State projects that move forward do not result in diminished or withheld Small County Outreach Program (SCOP) or Small County Road Assistance Program (SCRAP) funding, as such funding is key to public road improvement and maintenance in Levy County. In addition, it is of critical concern to the Board that Broadband Infrastructure be included in any such State projects, as the availability of such service is necessary to support education and business development within the County.

5. The County Coordinator is directed to forward a copy of this Resolution to the Governor, the Secretary of FDOT, the President of the Florida Senate, and the Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives.

6. The Resolution shall take effect upon adoption by the Board.

**DULY ADOPTED** this 21<sup>st</sup> day of December, 2021.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
LEVY COUNTY, FLORIDA

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John Meeks, Chair

ATTEST: Clerk of the Circuit Court  
and Ex Officio to the Board

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Danny J. Shipp

Approved as to form and legal sufficiency:

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Nicolle M. Shalley, County Attorney