

Port Manatee Connector

PD&E STUDY

from Port Manatee to I-75

DRAFT PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), initiated the Port Manatee Connector Project Development and Environment Study (PD&E) Study in May 2008. The PD&E Study involves the analysis of a range of alternatives for enhanced access between Port Manatee in Manatee County and Interstate 75 (I-75). To meet the purpose and need objectives of the project, the proposed improvements may include upgrades to existing roadways and alternatives on a new east-west alignment.

Port Manatee and I-75 are both included in Florida's Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) plan. Port Manatee is the fourth largest deepwater seaport in the State of Florida¹ and is located on Tampa Bay west of US 41 in northwestern Manatee County. This major seaport, with access to the Gulf of Mexico, manages the shipment of over 5 million tons of agricultural and industrial imports and exports annually. I-75 is located approximately five miles east of Port Manatee and is a primary north-south corridor that traverses through the State of Florida from Miami to the Georgia state line south of Valdosta. I-75 serves local and regional transportation needs and is a major corridor for intrastate and interstate commerce.

The Port Manatee Connector will provide access to Port Manatee at US 41 and connect to a new or modified interchange with I-75 within the study area. The study area for the Port Manatee Connector PD&E Study generally extends from I-275 to State Road 674 and from the Tampa Bay coast line to east of I-75, in northern Manatee County and southern Hillsborough County. The PD&E Study process will involve the development and evaluation of environmental impacts and construction related costs in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and related federal and state requirements. The Port Manatee Connector PD&E Study will include an evaluation of all reasonable alternatives that meet the purpose and need established for this project.

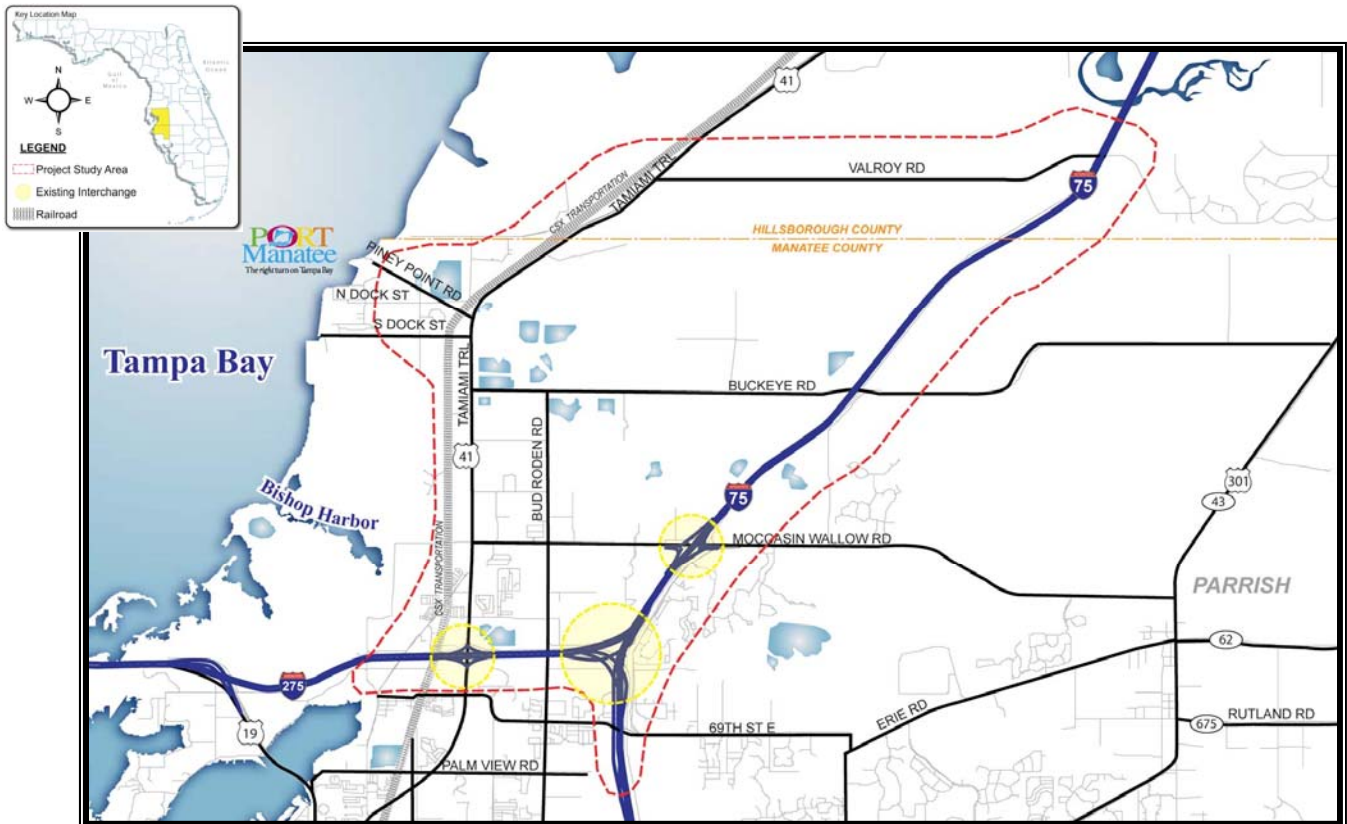
PROJECT BACKGROUND

As a result of planned regional development, population and employment increases, and significant economic growth potential at Port Manatee, the Port Manatee Connector Feasibility Study was initiated in 2005 to analyze the need for transportation improvements to enhance traffic flow between Port Manatee and I-75. Completed in October 2006, the

¹ Port Authority Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (Fiscal Year ending September 2007)



Feasibility Study provided a preliminary evaluation of the purpose and need for the proposed project and documented the feasibility of viable corridors for the proposed Port Manatee Connector. The results of the Feasibility Study indicated the need for the proposed project and identified six viable corridors for further study. The PD&E Study will incorporate information from the Feasibility Study and re-evaluate the project study area to develop appropriate analyses and documentation that will comply with FHWA and NEPA requirements. The study will proceed with no pre-determined solution(s) while allowing opportunities for input from all stakeholders including local governments; local, state, and federal agencies; property owners and interested parties.



PROJECT PURPOSE

The purpose of the proposed project is to enhance intermodal connectivity, improve goods movement and traffic flow between Port Manatee and I-75 and to provide the necessary transportation infrastructure to encourage economic development at Port Manatee. Implementing the proposed action will enhance regional connectivity, improve system linkage, mobility, accommodate expected traffic needs, support regional and statewide economic development, and provide an additional evacuation route for the surrounding community.



PROJECT NEED

An enhanced roadway connection from I-75 to Port Manatee would serve as a crucial freight route, improve the overall efficiency of the existing highway network and relieve congestion at the gateway to the port. The need for the Port Manatee Connector is supported by local, statewide and nationwide land use, economic and growth objectives based on various factors including modal interrelationships, system linkage, port growth, travel demand, government authority, social and economic growth, the capacity of the existing roads, and safety and evacuation.

Modal Interrelationships

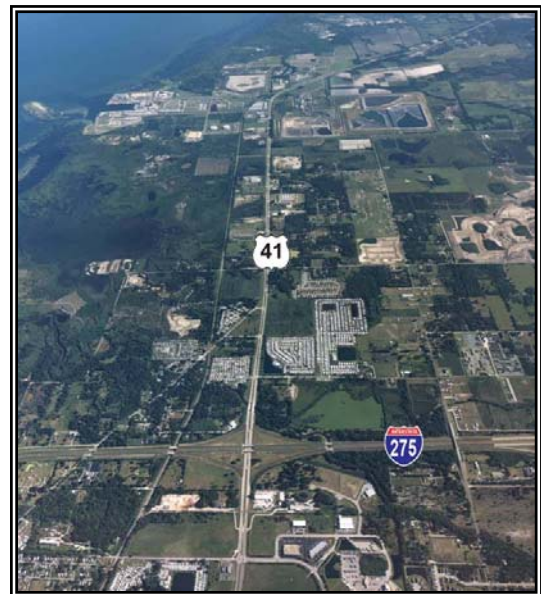
Port Manatee and I-75 are both included in Florida's Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) plan. The SIS is a statewide network of high priority transportation facilities including highways, freight rail lines, airports, seaports, and other key intermodal facilities. Florida's economic prosperity and ability to compete domestically and globally depend on an efficient interconnected transportation system.

Port Manatee is the closest deepwater seaport between the United States and the Panama Canal. Port Manatee's economic growth is attributed to its geographic proximity to the Central American and Caribbean markets. *Enhanced intermodal connectivity between Port Manatee and I-75 is necessary to provide efficient movement of goods throughout the regional, statewide and global marketplaces.*

System Linkage

As of 2008, almost 75% of the truck traffic exiting or entering Port Manatee uses I-75 during their travel route.² However, there is no existing direct access between Port Manatee and I-75, which are both designated SIS facilities. A proposed new corridor would link the existing SIS seaport to the SIS highway and provide a more direct route for freight traffic to improve truck access from the seaport to the surrounding region. *The Port Manatee Connector would provide improved system linkage and enhance regional connectivity.*

As of 2008, approximately 85% of the seven million tons of cargo distributed through Port Manatee is delivered through trucks. US 41, a north-south major arterial, serves as the gateway to the port and is the only regional roadway facility within the immediate vicinity of the seaport. Freight traffic must travel north or south on US 41 to access east-west facilities such as I-275, SR 674 or Moccasin-Wallow Road which eventually connect to I-75. *The*



Source: Aerial Cartographics of America, Inc. (October 2007)

² Draft Origination/Destination Survey (August 2008) for the Port Manatee Connector PD&E Study

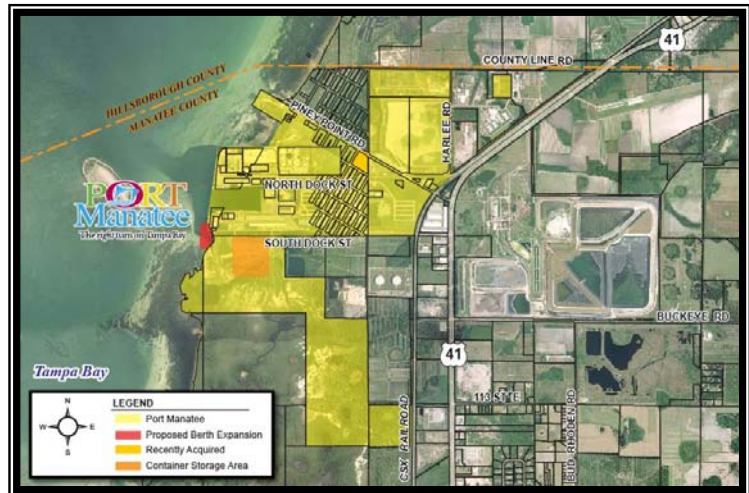


proposed project is needed to improve traffic flow to facilitate more efficient movement of goods.

Economic Development at Port Manatee

Port Manatee is ranked fifth in total waterborne trade tonnage among Florida's 14 identified deepwater seaports according to the *Florida Ports Council: Statistics*. Several factors including Port expansion, strategic development and the Panama Canal expansion are anticipated to contribute to increased economic development at Port Manatee.

Port Manatee recently completed several facility upgrades including construction of a new 172,000 sq. ft warehouse, adding an access control center and most recently, the installation of a harbor crane. Future plans include widening an existing berth and construction of an intermodal container yard. These improvements are expected to promote economic growth for Port Manatee by diversifying the functions at the seaport and increasing operational efficiency.



Source: Manatee County Port Authority (November 2007)

The Port Manatee Encouragement Zone was developed to designate surrounding privately-owned property with compatible land uses to support future Port Manatee expansion plans. The proposed plan includes the rezoning of thousands of acres of adjacent lands as port-related or port supportive. Landowners within the Encouragement Zone are anticipated to benefit through expedited development reviews and permitting applications. These incentives are expected to encourage commercial and industrial growth immediately adjacent to Port Manatee.

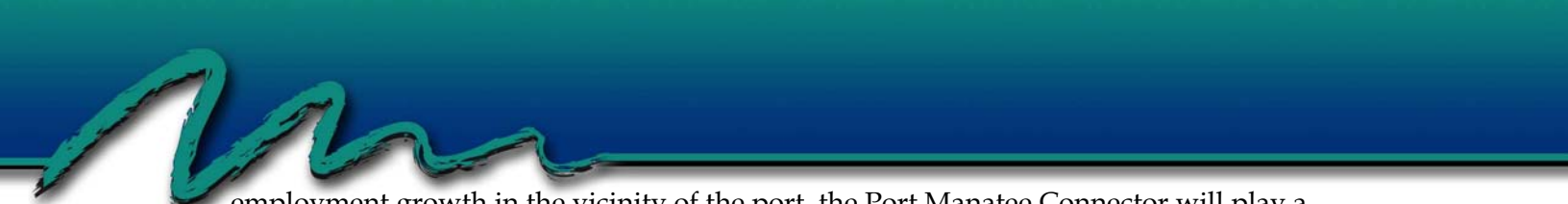


Source: CH2M HILL (August 2008)

The Panama Canal is under construction to expand the existing facility to almost double the existing capacity by 2014. The canal expansion is anticipated to result in a significant growth in international commerce. As the closest deep-water U.S. port to the Panama Canal, Port Manatee is in a unique position to facilitate the increased trade expected through global markets.

Port Manatee is expected to double in size and capacity within the next ten years. With the planned expansion of Port Manatee, in conjunction with the anticipated population and





employment growth in the vicinity of the port, the Port Manatee Connector will play a critical role in accommodating travel demands and improving the movement of goods and people. *The future economic development anticipated at Port Manatee due to facility expansion, surrounding commercial and industrial development and the Panama Canal expansion is dependent upon the necessary transportation infrastructure to accommodate the efficient movement of people and goods.*

Port Manatee is estimated to contribute approximately 22,000 jobs and nearly 2.3 billion dollars to the regional economy. Providing transportation infrastructure to support the continued economic development of Port Manatee is crucial to the economic vitality of the surrounding community. *The proposed project is intended to support the economic development of Port Manatee which translates to regional economic benefit.*

Transportation Demand

A proposed SIS connector between Port Manatee and I-75 is identified in the 2030 SIS Multi-Modal Unfunded Needs Plan. Also, this project has been identified as a priority for the region and is identified in the 2030 Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Cost-Feasible Plan as a needs project. The proposed project is consistent with the Manatee County Comprehensive Plan which includes objectives to “maintain and improve intermodal highway and rail transportation access to Port Manatee.”³ Similarly, the Hillsborough County MPO LRTP states the “goal of the Plan is to give priority to improvements that facilitate the efficient transfers of people and freight”.⁴ However, the proposed project is not included in either the Hillsborough County MPO LRTP or the Hillsborough County Comprehensive Plan. Based on project coordination conducted during the Feasibility Study, Hillsborough County governmental officials do not support a proposed corridor in southern Hillsborough County as this portion of the study is located within a predominantly rural area that is outside the urban service area. Additional project coordination will be conducted during the PD&E Study to ensure any proposed improvements are consistent with local government comprehensive plans and long range transportation plans.

Federal, State or Government Authority

The proposed facility enhances international and statewide trade transportation networks consistent with national objectives to increase global economic activity. In a recent visit to Port Manatee in September 2007, Mary Peters - U.S. Secretary of Transportation expressed support for the proposed project. The PD&E Study allows for opportunities for input from local governments, state and federal agencies throughout the project.


Social Demands and Economic Development

While the surrounding land use in Manatee and Hillsborough County is predominantly rural, significant residential land development is approved or planned within the study area. The analyses conducted during the PD&E Study will include consideration of all approved and planned land uses. The population of Manatee County is projected to increase from 304,364 in year 2005 to 470,908 in year 2030. Similarly, the population of

³ Manatee County Comprehensive Plan (April 2007)

⁴ Hillsborough County MPO LRTP (Amended June 2007)





Hillsborough County is projected to increase from 1,131,546 in year 2005 to 1,680,553 in year 2030.⁵

A regional intermodal center is being planned by CSX Transportation northeast of the proposed project in Winter Haven, Florida to provide the necessary railroad infrastructure to accommodate large freight shipments. This intermodal center will likely increase freight shipments to Port Manatee as a result of the increased activity in the surrounding regions. Major industrial development near the port includes the potential construction of a plant to facilitate operations of the Gulfstream Pipeline.

Future land uses and population and employment growth in the vicinity of the port is anticipated to increase traffic demand on the existing transportation network which will constrain the efficient movement of people and goods from Port Manatee. Increased roadway capacity is expected to be needed to accommodate the projected traffic demand.

Capacity

Within Manatee County, the existing traffic on I-75 is approximately 64,500 vehicles per day.⁶ Future traffic projections indicate the need to widen I-75 to ten lanes to accommodate the anticipated traffic demand through the year 2035. Based on the results of the traffic analysis conducted during the Feasibility Study, the proposed project is needed to provide improved traffic operations to increase the efficient movement of goods. *Future economic development at Port Manatee is dependent on providing additional capacity to the existing transportation network as the majority of the shipment of goods is distributed through freight traffic.* An enhanced roadway connection from I-75 to Port Manatee would serve as a crucial freight route, improve the overall efficiency of the existing highway network and relieve congestion at the gateway to the port.

Safety and Emergency Evacuation

The proposed project is anticipated to improve safety and enhance evacuation capacity. The proposed project would likely enhance overall safety by improving traffic flow. Also, by improving traffic flow from US 41 to I-75, two primary north-south evacuation routes designated by the Florida Division of Emergency Management, the proposed project is expected to facilitate the movement of increased traffic during emergency evacuation periods. The Port Manatee Connector is also anticipated to improve traffic operations and relieve traffic congestion on parallel facilities (Moccasin Wallow Road and I-275), which may decrease evacuation and response times on the existing transportation network.

⁵ Bureau of Economic Business Research

⁶ I-75 PD&E Study (Manatee County); Based on Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) north of I-275

