



**MARTIN METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION  
POLICY BOARD MEETING**  
Martin County Administrative Building Commission Chambers  
2401 SE Monterey Road  
Stuart, FL 34996  
[www.martinmpo.com](http://www.martinmpo.com)  
(772) 221-1498

**Monday, June 16, 2025 @ 9:00 am**

**MINUTES**

- 1. CALL TO ORDER** – Commissioner Sarah Heard called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.
- 2. PRAYER** – Pastor Jim Harp, Stuart Alliance Church, led the Invocation.
- 3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** – Commissioner Sarah Heard led the Pledge of Allegiance.
- 4. ROLL CALL** – Susan Ortiz, Administrative Assistant, called roll.

**PRESENT:**

Commissioner Eileen Vargas  
Commissioner Sarah Heard  
Commissioner Stacey Hetherington  
Commissioner Blake Capps  
Mayor Carmine Dipaolo  
Commissioner Christopher Collins  
Commissioner Sean Reed  
Commissioner Kaija Mayfield

**REPRESENTING:**

Martin County Board of County Commission  
Martin County Board of County Commission  
Martin County Board of County Commission  
Martin County Board of County Commission  
Village of Indiantown Council  
City of Stuart Commission  
City of Stuart Commission  
Town of Sewall’s Point Commission

**ABSENT:**

Commissioner Edward Ciampi                      Martin County Board of County Commission

**Staff in Attendance:**

Beth Beltran, MPO Administrator  
Ricardo Vazquez, Principal Planner  
Margie Tamblyn, Senior Planner  
Lucine Martens, Planner  
Susan Ortiz, Administrative Assistant

**Others in Attendance:**

Jim Harp, Stuart Alliance Church  
James Brown Jr., Florida’s Turnpike Enterprise

Amanda Ashby, Adurra  
Vanita Saini, FDOT  
Cesar Martinez, FDOT  
Henry Pinzon, FDOT  
Jazlyn Heywood, FDOT  
Kelly Budhu, FDOT  
Jacob DeRoos  
Tyrone Monte  
Parker Besade  
Bonnie Besade  
Bill Howell  
Lavern Williams

**A quorum was present for the meeting.**

## **5. APPROVE AGENDA**

**A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Stacey Hetherington and was seconded by Mayor Carmine Dipaolo. The motion passed unanimously.**

## **6. APPROVE MINUTES**

MPO Board Meeting – May 12, 2025

**A motion to approve the May 12, 2025, MPO Policy Board minutes was made by Mayor Dipaolo and seconded by Commissioner Collins. The motion passed unanimously.**

**7. PUBLIC COMMENTS – The public requested to speak during the Cove Road presentation.**

## **8. AGENDA ITEMS**

### **A. FY25-FY29 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP) MODIFICATION #2**

Margie Tamblyn, MPO Senior Planner, presented to the Board and began by noting that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) had reviewed both the State and local TIP documents. The review revealed some inconsistencies that needed to be corrected to ensure the local TIP matched the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Ms. Tamblyn emphasized that these adjustments did not represent a loss of funding but rather a reallocation to maintain consistency across documents. State Route (SR) 710 saw a funding reduction from \$35 million to \$30 million in the current TIP. Ms. Tamblyn clarified that this reduction was temporary and administrative. In the upcoming FY26–FY30 TIP cycle, the project is expected to receive \$47 million, reaffirming its priority and funding commitment. The Willoughby Boulevard Extension, from SE Monterey Road to US-1, received a funding increase of \$62,631. This adjustment was also part of the effort to align with the STIP. Ms. Tamblyn concluded by inviting questions or comments from the Board.

**A motion to approve FY25-FY29 TIP Modification #2 was made by Commissioner Hetherington and seconded by Commissioner Reed. The motion passed unanimously.**

**B. PUBLIC HEARING  
FINAL DRAFT FY26-FY30 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM**

Ms. Tamblyn provided a brief overview of the updates made since the draft was last presented. She noted that the FY25 Capital Improvement Plan from Sewall's Point had been incorporated, and FDOT project managers had submitted minor comments regarding project lengths and phase adjustments. Ms. Tamblyn confirmed that no public comments had been received prior to the hearing, and none were offered during the meeting. Commissioner Reed asked for clarification regarding the changes in project lengths noted in the TIP, expressing a desire to understand why such adjustments occur. Ms. Tamblyn explained that the MPO receives this information directly from FDOT and that, occasionally, discrepancies arise. When project managers notice inconsistencies, they make corrections to ensure accuracy.

**A motion to approve Public Hearing FY26-FY30 Transportation Improvement Program was made by Commissioner Collins and seconded by Mayor Dipaolo. The motion passed unanimously.**

**C. COVE ROAD PRESENTATION**

Ms. Beltran introduced the representatives from FDOT and their consultant team. Vanita Saini, FDOT's project manager for Cove Road, opened the presentation by introducing herself and Amanda Ashby, the project consultant. Ms. Saini explained that the purpose of the presentation was to brief the Board on the status and scope of the widening project and to address any questions following the overview. Ms. Ashby then presented to the Board.

Commissioner Hetherington questioned the proposed traffic configuration on Gaines Avenue. She noted that, based on her own review using Google Maps, Gaines Avenue currently operates as a one-way street, allowing eastbound travelers on Cove Road to turn right onto Gaines. Ms. Saini clarified that under the proposed configuration, Gaines Avenue would become a two-way street. This would allow eastbound traffic on Cove Road to turn right onto Gaines and northbound traffic on Gaines to turn right onto Cove Road. Commissioner Hetherington asked whether any changes were proposed to Gaines Avenue west of Kanner Highway. Ms. Saini confirmed that no changes were planned for that segment. Commissioner Hetherington also confirmed that residents from Gaines Avenue and South Fork River Estates had participated in public meetings. Ms. Saini affirmed that the project team had met with those communities twice to discuss the proposed changes.

Commissioner Hetherington then raised a concern about drainage design along the Cove Road corridor, particularly in the segment between Kanner Highway and SE Avalon Drive, which she described as a notably wet area. She asked for more details about how water would be managed, specifically whether any structures would be installed to direct water beneath the roadway. Ms. Saini explained that the existing drainage system on Cove Road is an open swale configuration. Under the proposed widening project, this would be

replaced with a closed drainage system featuring curb and gutter. Ms. Saini emphasized that the project is still in the Project Development and Environment (PD&E) phase, and detailed design elements—such as the number and placement of drainage structures—will be addressed during the design phase.

Commissioner Heard noted that the project appeared to impact approximately eight acres of wetlands and questioned how this aligned with the county's comprehensive plan, which prohibits wetland impacts. Ms. Saini responded by outlining FDOT's mitigation process. Commissioner Heard pointed out that the county does not currently allow mitigation and expressed interest in how this conflict would be addressed as the project moved forward.

Commissioner Heard also inquired about the Montego Cove neighborhood and whether the existing wall would be impacted by the project. Ms. Saini confirmed that it would not, but noted that a shared-use path would be added in front of it. Commissioner Heard expressed support for a committee recommendation to include shade trees along the shared-use path.

Commissioner Heard then invited public speakers to the podium.

Mr. Newell addressed the Board with concerns about the Cove Road widening project, focusing on three primary issues: roadway width, drainage, and wetland impacts. He emphasized that the proposed roadway section is excessively wide, noting that in some areas near his home, the right-of-way expands to 150–200 feet, despite the road fitting within 80–90 feet elsewhere. He urged FDOT to scale back the design. Mr. Newell also questioned the proposed 12-foot-wide bike paths, suggesting that such a width is excessive for typical bicycle use and should be reconsidered. Regarding drainage and wetlands, he reiterated concerns about the project's impact on sensitive areas, especially given the already challenging conditions in the corridor. Finally, Mr. Newell challenged the underlying justification for widening, stating that Cove Road is not currently over capacity and likely won't be until 2035. He warned that wider roads tend to encourage higher vehicle speeds, which could reduce safety rather than improve it.

Mr. Jacob DeRoos began by urging the Board to reconsider the current access plan for Montego Cove's 182-unit community. He emphasized that an alternative would offer a larger stacking area and significantly improve safety for residents. Mr. DeRoos expressed skepticism about the feasibility of the proposed turning movements, stating that the actual maneuvering required was not safe and posed a high risk to residents. He also raised concerns about noise impacts, noting that while the north side of Cove Road is receiving a sound wall, Montego Cove is not receiving any wall at all. Lastly, Mr. DeRoos highlighted flooding concerns, pointing out that Montego Cove's current entryway lies within a Martin County flood zone. He closed by asking the committee to revisit the design with a focus on safety, sound mitigation, and flood resilience.

Mr. Tyrone Monte addressed the Board, echoing concerns raised by previous speakers. He emphasized the need to consider safety and environmental impacts, suggesting that the project's scale could increase vehicle speeds. He proposed a vegetative noise barrier as a more environmentally friendly alternative to traditional sound walls. Mr. Monte also raised specific concerns about the Montego Cove access configuration, describing the required right turn followed by a multi-lane crossing as dangerous. He warned of a high

collision risk for residents attempting to turn westbound. Additionally, Mr. Monte flagged the growing presence of e-bikes on shared-use paths, noting their silent operation, high speeds, and lack of regulation as safety issues for pedestrians and cyclists. He suggested reconsidering the placement of bike lanes, proposing that they remain on the Hibiscus side of the corridor to reduce conflicts. He concluded by urging the Board to rethink the scale and design of the project.

Mr. Parker Besade voiced his concerns about the Cove Road project. He noted that infrastructure decisions made today will shape the environment that his generation will inherit. While he acknowledged the inclusion of shared-use paths and roundabouts as positive features, he expressed concern about the overall scale of the project, particularly the four-lane configuration and wide medians. Mr. Besade described the challenges of crossing roundabouts and navigating wide roads as a frequent pedestrian, and emphasized the value of a community where people can walk, bike, and interact without being forced to rely on cars. He also touched on broader concerns about development trends, stating that many residents—especially youth—are surprised and disheartened by the pace and scale of new projects.

Ms. Laverne Williams raised a question regarding the traffic signal at Willoughby Boulevard, asking whether it was being removed and replaced with a roundabout as part of the Cove Road widening project. Ms. Saini clarified that Willoughby Boulevard at Cove Road will remain a signalized intersection under the current design.

Commissioner Heard addressed a question from Mr. Monty regarding whether a scientific study had been conducted to justify the prioritization of the Cove Road widening project. She clarified that no specific study had been prepared for this purpose; rather, the project was prioritized based on a majority decision by the MPO Board. Ms. Beltran responded that the project has been included in the Long Range Transportation Plan since the 2020 Plan which was approved in 1994. She referenced planning studies, including a freight movement study, that support the need to widen Cove Road. Additional analyses are available, which Ms. Beltran noted can be forwarded to Mr. Monty. Commissioner Heard reiterated that prioritization ultimately reflects the MPO Board's majority decision. Ms. Beltran further explained that the Board of County Commissioners has approved development along Cove Road, triggering concurrency requirements. To accommodate this growth, the road must be widened. If the project does not proceed through the MPO process, the County would be responsible for the cost using local funds and impact fees. Having the project go through the MPO process allows for State and Federal resources to fund the cost of the widening.

#### **D. TURNPIKE DIRECT CONNECT – PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE PRESENTATION**

Ms. Beltran introduced Jazlyn Heywood, who presented to the commissioners. Commissioner Heard asked when the actual design phase was scheduled to begin. FDOT staff responded that the project is expected to be funded for design around 2031.

Commissioner Capps inquired whether there are other examples of direct-connect arrangements between I-95 and Florida's Turnpike in South Florida, similar to what's being proposed in the current project. Ms. Heywood responded that while there are direct

connections involving other corridors, there are no known examples of direct interchanges specifically between I-95 and the Turnpike in this region. Commissioner Capps then asked how high-speed motorists on the Turnpike would be alerted to this unusual configuration. Mr. Pinzon responded that advance signage would be used to ensure drivers are properly informed.

Commissioner Hetherington voiced concern about the limited public engagement surrounding the Turnpike widening project, noting that the initiative is a major infrastructure undertaking with potential impacts across Martin County and even into southern Palm Beach County. She emphasized the importance of early public involvement, warning that without awareness and participation now, the project could face heightened scrutiny and resistance later from residents who feel blindsided or excluded. Ms. Heywood agreed and outlined current outreach strategies. She also highlighted a newer method, geofencing, which targets individuals who frequently travel through the project corridor, even if they don't live nearby. This approach aims to capture feedback from commuters and corridor users who may be directly affected by the changes.

**A motion to approve the Turnpike Direct Connect – Preferred Alternative was made by Commissioner Mayfield and seconded by Commissioner Capps. The motion passed unanimously.**

#### **E. FINAL DRAFT FY27-FY31 LIST OF PROJECT PRIORITIES**

Mr. Vazquez presented the List of Project Priorities to the Board. He noted that the list had undergone minimal changes since its initial presentation. He also mentioned that all advisory committees recommended reordering the list to move Priority #5 (SR-710 at CR-609 intersection improvements) up to #3, shifting the Cove Road Widening and Bridge Road Bridge Replacement projects down one slot.

Commissioner Reed raised a question regarding Priority #9, which proposes midblock pedestrian crosswalks along Monterey Road and East Ocean Boulevard, between Kingswood Terrace and St. Lucie Boulevard. He asked whether the design would resemble the crosswalks currently in place on Dixie Highway near Golden Gate. Mr. Vazquez stated that the exact design has not yet been determined but confirmed that the intent is to include some form of midblock pedestrian crossings along the corridor.

Commissioner Collins expressed support for the advisory committee's recommendation to move Priority #5 up to Priority #3, aligning it with other SR-710 projects to emphasize safety and funding urgency. He then revisited a question raised earlier regarding the Bascule Bridge replacement on SE Bridge Road, asking why it is ranked so high on the priority list, above projects like Palm City Road, which he viewed as a more critical corridor. Mr. Vazquez responded that the current priority order was established by the previous MPO Board, and the bridge's placement likely reflects an effort to secure federal and state funding for its replacement. Mr. George Dzama noted that a State-conducted feasibility study is underway but has not yet been finalized. Once the study is complete, it may influence the bridge's ranking on the priority list. For now, staff recommends keeping the project in its current position to ensure it remains eligible for future funding consideration.

Commissioner Hetherington voiced strong support for moving the SR-710/CR-609 signal and intersection improvement project up to Priority #3, aligning it with the other SR-710 corridor priorities.

Commissioner Capps questioned the unfunded safety priority list and its relationship to the broader list of unfunded project priorities. He asked whether the safety list was considered a lower priority. Mr. Vazquez clarified that the two lists represent separate funding categories, not hierarchical rankings. Commissioner Capps then asked about Priority #1 on the safety list. He inquired whether other crossings in Martin County also required upgrades. Mr. Vazquez responded that the County had reviewed crossings and submitted an application for improvements at five identified locations in Hobe Sound, which were considered the most critical. Mr. Dzama further explained that the County's preliminary Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for FY 2026 includes funding estimates for rail safety improvements, based on a projected cost of \$600,000 per crossing—totaling approximately \$3 million. If grant funding is not secured, the County still intends to move forward with improvements using local resources. Commissioner Capps asked about the timeline for implementation. Staff noted that a recent walkthrough with FDOT District Four helped scope the grant, and preliminary indications suggest the project may be included in a five-year Work Program, potentially placing construction in FY 2030 or FY 2031.

Commissioner Vargas expressed concern that Martin County District One was not adequately represented on the unfunded safety priority list, despite known safety issues in the area. She referenced recent meetings and studies that highlighted challenges with the Jensen Beach Boulevard roundabout and the need for second-train incoming warning signals and signal improvements near the rail crossings. She noted that crosswalks are being relocated to midblock stretches in Jensen Beach to improve pedestrian safety but emphasized that more comprehensive improvements are needed. Commissioner Vargas questioned why these projects were not included on the current list. Ms. Beltran responded that the second-train warning system is already listed as Project #1 on the safety priority list, encompassing areas like Jensen Beach. Signal improvements are also part of that project scope. Ms. Beltran noted that this is the first year the safety list has been developed and that it will evolve as more projects are scoped and prioritized.

Commissioner Hetherington addressed the unfunded safety priority list, expressing concern about the ranking inconsistency between it and the primary roadway priority list. She pointed out that Palm City Road (from Monterey to US-1) is listed as Priority #8 on the main priority list yet appears lower on the safety list. She argued that if the project is considered a top priority in one context, it should be reflected similarly in the safety list to expedite funding. Staff emphasized that priority ranking is influenced by project maturity. Projects that are further along in planning and coordination are better positioned to secure funding in the upcoming Work Program.

**A motion to approve the Final Draft FY27-FY31 List of Project Priorities, with the recommendation to move priority #5 to priority #3, was made by Commissioner Hetherington, and seconded by Commissioner Collins. The motion passed unanimously.**

## **F. SR-710 PROJECTS UPDATE**

Cesar Martinez, District Four Planning & Environmental Administrator, provided an update on the SR-710 corridor widening project. He confirmed that the design phase is still underway, and that the team is actively pursuing construction funding to advance the project. Martinez noted that the State budget is still being finalized, with funding allocations expected within the next two weeks. Once allocations are confirmed, the standard Work Program balancing process will begin in July, and FDOT will return in the fall to present the draft Work Program. Regarding the signalization at CR-609/Allapattah Road, Mr. Martinez shared that FDOT has executed a supplemental agreement with the design consultant to conduct a traffic warrant analysis. This study will determine whether a traffic signal is justified based on engineering criteria. An update on the signalization assessment is expected by October or sooner. Currently, the signal is included as part of the overall corridor design contract, but Mr. Martinez acknowledged feedback from the Board about the potential need to separate the signalization from the broader corridor project. He is committed to exploring that option in coordination with County staff.

## **G. SU/TMA Funding Split**

Ms. Beltran explained Agenda Item G, which concerned the SU/TMA funding split between the Martin MPO and the St. Lucie TPO. At the previous meeting, the MPO Board directed staff to draft a letter requesting that the current 68% St. Lucie / 32% Martin funding allocation remain in place. Ms. Beltran stated that the St. Lucie TPO Board discussed the letter at their recent meeting and opted to respond directly to District Secretary Steve Braun. It was noted that the District Secretary may recommend a publicly advertised meeting between the TPO Chair, the MPO Chair (Commissioner Heard), and FDOT. Given that the next MPO board meeting is not scheduled until September, and the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is due in October, staff recommended that the Board authorize Commissioner Heard to participate in such a meeting prior to September, should it be scheduled.

**A motion to authorize MPO Chair Commissioner Heard to meet with the St. Lucie TPO Chair and the District Four Secretary to discuss the SU/TMA funding split, should such a meeting be scheduled before the next MPO Board meeting in September, was made by Commissioner Hetherington, and seconded by Mayor Dipaolo. The motion passed unanimously.**

**9. COMMENTS FROM FDOT – None**

**10. COMMENTS FROM ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS – None**

**11. COMMENTS FROM BOARD MEMBERS – None**

**NOTES**

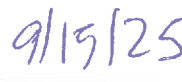
- **Development Review Map Update**
- **State Certification Packet**
- **2050 LRTP Cost Feasible Open House – City of Stuart Commission Chambers – August 26, 2025, 4:30PM to 6:30PM**

**NEXT MEETING - MPO Policy Board Meeting – September 15, 2025**

**ADJOURNMENT: 10:40 AM**

**Approved by:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Sarah Heard, Chair  
Martin County Commissioner**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**Prepared by:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Susan Ortiz, Administrative Assistant**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**Minutes Approved on September 15, 2025**

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