

**NATURAL RESOURCES EVALUATION
ADDENDUM TO THE WETLAND EVALUATION
AND BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT REPORT**

**I-275 (State Road 93)
Project Development & Environment Study**

**From north of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard (SR 574)
to north of Bearss Avenue (SR 678/CR 582)**

Hillsborough County, Florida

ETDM Number: 13854
Work Program Item Segment Number: 431821-1

**Florida Department of Transportation
District Seven
Tampa, Florida**

The environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried out by Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) pursuant to 23 U.S.C. §327 and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) dated December 14, 2016 and executed by Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and FDOT.

February 2019

FINAL

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Prepared by:
ESA Scheda
Tampa, Florida

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INTRODUCTION

This Natural Resources Evaluation (NRE) addendum to the *Wetland Evaluation and Biological Assessment Report* (May 2015) is provided to summarize the project changes and update the impacts associated with the updated Build Alternative.

PROJECT UPDATE

The proposed action evaluates the need to provide capacity and operational improvements along 7.70 miles of State Road 93 (SR 93)/Interstate 275 (I-275) from north of MLK Boulevard to north of Bearss Avenue in Hillsborough County, Florida. This evaluation considers the operational and highway safety benefits of implementing capacity improvements and compares them to the cost savings and minimization of adverse impacts associated with a No-Build Alternative. An evaluation matrix compares the No-Build and Build Alternative on a variety of factors. This process identifies the alternative that best balances the benefits (such as improved traffic operations and safety) with the impacts (such as environmental effects and construction costs).

The Build Alternative includes one additional travel lane in each direction of I-275. The proposed typical section contains four 12-foot general purpose lanes in each direction and accommodates transit on the inside shoulders. The improvements would be constructed on the existing alignment with the same existing horizontal and vertical geometries. All the proposed improvements within the I-275 project corridor would be accomplished within the existing right of way. Minimal right of way may be required at the Bearss Avenue interchange for storm water ponds.

Planning for the Tampa Bay area interstates began in the late 1980s with the Tampa Interstate Study (TIS) Master Plan being approved in late 1980s with improvements outlined to relieve congestion and improve mobility. The TIS Master Plan included additional travel lanes on the Tampa Bay area interstates and included a transit envelope for the east-west movement but not along this segment of I-275.

In 2013, building upon the original TIS Master Plan, the Tampa Bay Express (TBX) program was developed to provide guidance for improvements to the Tampa Bay interstate system and identified freeway segments (including this segment of I-275) for the addition of tolled express lanes. In 2017, FDOT District Seven reset TBX to Tampa Bay Next (TBNext) to demonstrate its commitment to comprehensive, integrated transportation planning and development. As part of TBNext, FDOT District Seven committed to remove the express lanes from this segment of I-275 and evaluate them on a separate corridor.

The improvements proposed for this segment of I-275, from north of MLK Boulevard to north of Bearss Avenue, will include one additional general purpose lane in each direction and improvements to the inside shoulder that will allow for the integration of infrastructure for transit.

Build Alternative

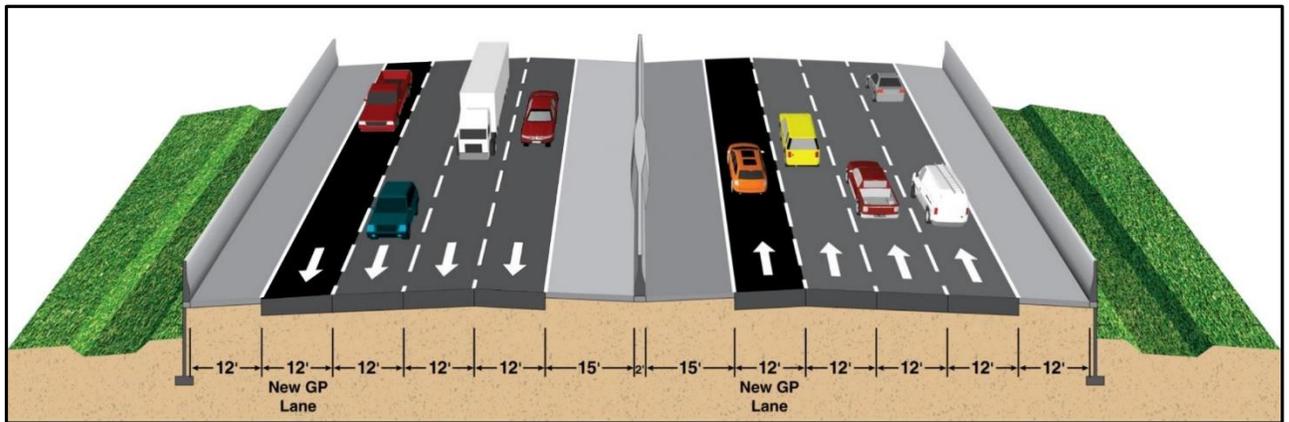
Mainline I-275

The Build Alternative includes widening I-275 from an existing six-lane divided interstate to an eight-lane divided interstate, plus accommodating transit on the inside shoulder. Operational Improvements will be implemented at Hillsborough Avenue. The Bearss Avenue bridge will be replaced along with ramp improvements; no other interchange configurations will change with the improvements. The remaining 17 existing bridges will be widened to accommodate the additional travel lanes.

The proposed typical section includes eight 12-foot wide general purpose lanes (four in each direction), two 15-foot wide inside shoulders which accommodate transit (one in each direction), 12-foot wide outside shoulders, and a 2-foot wide concrete barrier separating the two directions of travel. The proposed I-275 mainline typical section is shown in the figure below.

The existing horizontal and vertical alignment will be maintained in the Build Alternative to avoid right of way impacts. The proposed improvements for mainline I-275 will take place within the existing right of way. Minimal right of way may be required at the Bearss Avenue interchange for storm water ponds.

I-275 Proposed Typical Section - Updated



Interchanges

All interchange ramp connections will be impacted to accommodate the mainline widening of I-275; however, the interchange configurations will not change except for the Hillsborough Avenue and Bearss Avenue interchanges. Operational improvements will be included at these two interchanges only.

On Hillsborough Avenue, east of I-275, a signal is proposed for the on-ramp for I-275 northbound. An eastbound to northbound dual left will be constructed at this intersection by

widening Hillsborough Avenue to accommodate more vehicles entering I-275. Also, the I-275 northbound loop off-ramp will be reconstructed to direct traffic to this proposed signalized intersection.

The vertical and horizontal constraints at the existing bridges at the Bearss Avenue interchange cannot accommodate the proposed improvements; thus, the Bearss Avenue interchange will be reconstructed as a single point urban interchange (SPUI). The design includes reconstructing the I-275 bridge over Bearss Avenue and reconstructing the on- and off-ramps from the I-275 gores to approximately halfway to the Bearss Avenue intersection. The bridge design will accommodate potential future widening of Bearss Avenue. The bridge reconstruction will create the configuration for a SPUI interchange to be implemented in the future.

The future configuration would have one traffic signal underneath the I-275 bridge to control through traffic on Bearss Avenue and left-turning traffic entering or exiting I-275 at the intersection.

In the SPUI alternative, the I-275 bridge over Bearss Avenue would be reconstructed. The intersections on Bearss Avenue between Florida Avenue and Nebraska Avenue would be reconstructed. The future configuration would have one traffic signal underneath the I-275 bridge to control through traffic on Bearss Avenue and left-turning traffic entering or exiting I-275 at the intersection. The turning movements of the I-275 ramps and all the traffic movements for the Bearss Avenue interchange would be executed in one central area. Since a SPUI has one signalized intersection, it allows for simpler signal phasing and operations. However, with a wide intersection, the SPUI would require longer yellow and red signal phases compared to a conventional intersection.

WETLANDS AND SURFACE WATERS

Previously, a total of 3.45 acres of wetlands and surface waters (0.64 acres of wetlands and 2.81 acres of surface waters) were anticipated to be impacted as a result of this project. A field reconnaissance of the project area was conducted on September 26 and 27, and October 18, 2018 and there were no changes to the previously documented wetland and surface water areas. Appendix A of the original WEBAR depicts the wetland and surface water locations and is still accurate. Based upon the minor changes to the build alternative, and the fact that the project will be constructed within existing right of way, there are no anticipated changes to the previously documented wetland and surface water impacts.

Compensation for wetland impacts will likely be addressed pursuant to Florida Statutes (F.S.) Chapter 373.4137 in order to satisfy all mitigation requirements of Part IV, Chapter 373, F.S. and 33 United States Code (U.S.C.) 1344. A number of mitigation options are potentially available to mitigate for impacts to wetlands including public or private wetland mitigation banks; inclusion of the project into the FDOT Wetland Mitigation Plan; and wetland creation, restoration, or enhancement within watersheds in the project area. Mitigation options will be investigated further during the final design phase of the project.

PROTECTED SPECIES AND HABITAT

The original WEBAR cited the following effect determinations for species which may potentially occur:

Federally listed species

- Wood stork (*Mycteria americana*) – may affect, not likely to adversely affect;
- Eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon corais couperi*) – may affect, not likely to adversely affect; and
- West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus latirostris*) – may affect, not likely to adversely affect.

State-protected species

- Gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) – may affect, not likely to adversely affect;
- Florida sandhill crane (*Antigone canadensis pratensis*) – no adverse effect; and
- Wetland-dependent avian species – may affect, not likely to adversely affect.

Protected, Non-Listed Species

- Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) – no effect; and
- Bald eagle – (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) no effect.

Several federally and state listed species have been removed or added to the protection lists since the WEBAR was originally prepared. Species changes that pertain to this project are described below. These changes have not resulted in different effect determinations than those cited in the original WEBAR. Table 1 provides an update to those protected faunal species that pertain to this project and which have experienced a status or taxonomic change.

- In the 2015 WEBAR, the little blue heron, and tri-colored heron, were listed as species of special concern but as of January 2017 Florida's Official Endangered and Threatened Species List was updated and these species were re-classified as threatened. The limpkin, white ibis, snowy egret, osprey, gopher frog, and Florida mouse were listed as species of special concern in the 2015 WEBAR, but as of January 2017, they were removed from Florida's Endangered and Threatened Species List, although they are a part of FWC's Imperiled Species Management Plan.
- In the 2015 WEBAR, the West Indian manatee was listed as federally endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The USFWS reclassified the species as threatened on March 30, 2017.
- The Florida sandhill crane used to be known by the scientific name of *Grus canadensis pratensis*. New genetic information for this subspecies was discovered in 2010 and this resulted in a taxonomic reclassification by the American Ornithologist Union (AOU) in 2016. The accepted scientific name for the Florida sandhill crane is now *Antigone canadensis pratensis*.

Table 1. Status/Taxonomic Changes to Listed Faunal and Floral Species With Potential to Occur within the Project Limits

Common Name	Scientific Name	USFWS Status	FWC Status	Probability of Occurrence	Changes Since 2015 WEBAR
Amphibians					
Gopher frog	<i>Lithobates capito</i>	N	N	High	Delisted from FWC SSC
Birds					
Florida Sandhill Crane	<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	N	T	Moderate	Genus change from Grus to Antigone
Limpkin	<i>Aramus guarauna</i>	N	N	Moderate	Delisted from FWC SSC
Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	N	T	Moderate	Uplisted from FWC SSC to threatened
Snowy egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	N	N	Moderate	Delisted from FWC SSC
Tricolored Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>	N	T	Moderate	Uplisted from FWC SSC to threatened
White ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>	N	N	Moderate	Delisted from FWC SSC
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	N	N	Moderate	Delisted from FWC SSC
Mammals					
Florida mouse	<i>Podomys floridanus</i>	N	N	Moderate	Delisted from FWC SSC
West Indian Manatee	<i>Trichechus manatus latirostris</i>	T	N	Moderate	Downlisted from USFWS endangered to threatened

N: Not currently listed

T: Threatened

E: Endangered

SSC: Species of Special Concern

C: Candidate for federal listing

Source: USFWS, FWC

Low – Species with a low likelihood of occurrence within the project limits are defined as those species that are known to occur in Sarasota County, but preferred habitat is limited on the project corridor, or the species is rare.

Moderate - Species with a moderate likelihood for occurrence are those species known to occur in Sarasota County, and for which suitable habitat is well represented on the project limits, but no observations or positive indications exist to verify presence.

High - Species with a high likelihood for occurrence are suspected within the project limits based on known ranges and existence of sufficient preferred habitat on the corridor; are known to occur adjacent to the project limits; or have been previously observed or documented in the vicinity.

ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT (EFH)

The original WEBAR concluded that the project does not directly affect EFH resources; considering updates, the project still does not directly affect EFH resources.

COMMITMENTS AND CONCLUSION

The updated build alternative includes a revised typical section and slight modifications to the concept plan; it will still be constructed within existing row of way.

This review has not resulted in changes to anticipated impacts to wetlands; impact estimates remain 0.64 acres for wetlands and 2.81 acres of surface waters. Changes to wildlife impacts reflect changes in species' listing status and/or taxonomy only. Therefore, previously cited WEBAR findings have not changed.

The FDOT still commits to the following measures to address wetland and surface water impacts for this project:

- Practicable measures to avoid or minimize wetland impacts will be addressed during final design for the project;
- Provide a more detailed wetland delineation during the design phase to determine actual unavoidable wetland impacts and to then determine the resulting functional loss;
- Best Management Practices will be incorporated during construction to minimize surface water impacts to any off-site wetlands and surface waters that are affected by the proposed project; and
- Unavoidable wetland and surface water impacts will be mitigated pursuant to S. 373.4137 F.S. to satisfy all mitigation requirements of Part IV, Chapter 373 F.S. and 33 U.S.C.s 1344 which includes purchase of mitigation bank credits or use of the FDOT wetland mitigation inventory program.

The FDOT will still consider the following commitments to address wildlife impacts for this project:

- Gopher tortoise: Surveys for potentially affected gopher tortoise burrows will be conducted prior to construction, and permits to relocate tortoises and commensals as appropriate will be obtained from the FWC.
- Eastern indigo snake: The Standard Protection Measures for the Eastern Indigo Snake will be adhered to during construction of the project.
- Osprey: Surveys to update locations of active osprey nest sites will be conducted prior to construction, and permits will be acquired if impacts during construction are unavoidable. Coordination with FWC will take place, and a replacement nesting structure will be located in the immediate vicinity as appropriate.
- Wood stork: Impacts to potential wood stork suitable foraging habitat will be evaluated during the design phase, and mitigation for unavoidable impacts will be provided as appropriate.
- West Indian manatee: The FDOT will follow the standard manatee conditions for in-water work should bridge construction be required.

APPENDIX A

USFWS Concurrence

(to be included following agency coordination and receipt of concurrence with conclusions)

APPENDIX B

FFWCC Concurrence

(to be included following agency coordination and receipt of concurrence with conclusions)