



Master Plan 2007

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Prepared for
Northwest Florida
Transportation Corridor Authority

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I. Executive Summary

The Northwest Florida Transportation Corridor Authority (NFTCA) was created by the 2005 Florida Legislature. The enabling legislation is contained in Florida Statute Section 343.80. The primary purpose of the Authority is to improve mobility on the U.S. 98 corridor in Northwest Florida to enhance traveler safety, identify and develop hurricane evacuation routes, promote economic development along the corridor, and implement transportation projects to alleviate current or anticipated traffic congestion. The Authority is authorized to construct any feeder roads, reliever roads, connector roads, bypasses, or appurtenant facilities that are intended to improve mobility along the U.S. 98 corridor. The Authority is further authorized to plan, design, finance, and construct transportation improvement projects. The NFTCA may acquire and hold title to property that will accommodate the development of transportation facilities. Additionally, the Authority may seek financial assistance from local, State and the Federal government as well as private entities. The NFTCA is also authorized to implement toll facilities to aid in funding projects.

As its first order of business, the NFTCA was directed by the Florida Legislature to develop and adopt a corridor master plan no later than July 1, 2007. The goals and objectives of the master plan are to identify areas of the corridor where mobility, traffic safety, and efficient hurricane evacuation need to be improved; evaluate the economic development potential of the corridor and consider strategies to develop that potential; develop methods of building partnerships with local governments, other state and federal entities, the private-sector business community, and the public in support of corridor improvements; and to identify projects that will accomplish these goals and objectives. Presently, this is the only activity being pursued by the NFTCA.

Phase I of the Master Plan was completed in April 2006, by the FDOT. This phase consisted primarily of a data collection effort that documents existing conditions and identifies transportation projects recently completed or currently under study, design, right-of-way acquisition or construction. The primary purpose of this effort is to evaluate the effect of these planned projects on the transportation system during Phase II.

Phase II of the Master Plan included the development of a comprehensive Corridor Master Plan for US 98 and its associated transportation network. The Master Plan is intended to guide the development of a multimodal, intrastate transportation system that will serve the mobility needs of people and freight across northwest coastal Florida, minimize travel time for emergency evacuations and foster economic growth and development in the region. The key results from this effort include adopted goals and objectives, traffic data collection, land use data collection, traffic modeling, alternatives development and analysis, stakeholder involvement, and documentation of the Master Plan.

The development of the Master Plan followed an accepted process of developing goals and objectives, compiling and analyzing existing data, preparing travel forecasts based upon the best available data sources, and evaluating plan alternatives against the goals and objectives. The process included the development of four (4) initial alternatives that examined various combinations of projects to meet the Authority's goals and objectives. Public input on the development of the Master Plan has been received since August 2006, from comments received at monthly Authority meetings, website comments, letters, and e-mails. Four public workshops were held in February and March 2007 to afford opportunity for additional public input in the development of the Master Plan. Comments have been summarized and reviewed in preparing the Master Plan.

The final Master Plan has been developed by evaluating the performance measures of the various components forming each of the four alternatives relative to the established goals and objectives and in consideration of comments received as part of the public involvement program.

The Master Plan relies heavily upon the development of a new limited access corridor from just east of the Alabama State Line in Escambia County to SR 77 in Gulf County. This new facility that is generally parallel to US 98 affords substantial relief to the US 98 corridor through these more populated areas. Selected improvements to existing US 98 are also proposed at critical locations. Additionally, several north-to-south routes would be improved for both regional connectivity to the I-10 corridor to the north and to better facilitate hurricane evacuation along the coast. The plan would insure connectivity of at least one north-to-south four-lane divided highway in each of the eight counties. A major new bridge crossing is proposed across Escambia Bay. Relocation of US 98 in Franklin County east of the Apalachicola River to St. Teresa Island will reduce vulnerability during hurricanes and tropical storms ensuring public safety and commerce is not jeopardized in this area. Improving US 319 north to Tallahassee and improvements to SR 363 will further aid in evacuating the coastal areas of eastern Franklin and Wakulla Counties. The Master Plan is described in greater detail and depicted on maps elsewhere in this document.

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** The feasibility study for this project will begin with a reevaluation of the current alternatives that have been developed by the Emerald Coast Bridge Authority.

