



NOVEMBER 21, 2017

AGENDA ITEM 3C

REGIONAL MOBILITY PLAN ENVIRONMENTAL LANGUAGE UPDATE

TYPE OF ITEM: Consent

STATEMENT OF ISSUE

CRTPA staff is seeking Board approval of an update to the environmental language in the Connections 2040 Regional Mobility Plan as requested in the Transportation Management Area (TMA) Certification Report.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Option 1: Approve the updated environmental language (**Attachment 2**) for inclusion in the Connections 2040 Regional Mobility Plan (RMP).

HISTORY AND ANALYSIS

During the Transportation Management Area (TMA) Certification, held in February 2017, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) noted that the language for environmental mitigation in Connections 2040 Regional Mobility Plan (RMP) should be expanded to incorporate a variety of options to accommodate a variety of mitigation strategies. The “Corrective Action” language is shown as **Attachment 1**.

This was also noted as a “Corrective Action” in the TMA Certification Report on page 23. To address this action, CRTPA staff produced the “Environmental Considerations” language shown as **Attachment 2**. Additionally, CRTPA staff worked with FHWA staff to review and finalize this language

OPTIONS

Option 1: Approve the updated environmental language (**Attachment 2**) for inclusion in the Connections 2040 Regional Mobility Plan (RMP).
(RECOMMENDED)

Option 2: Provide other direction.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: TMA Certification “Corrective Action”

Attachment 2: RMP updated environmental language

4. **Linking Planning and Environment:** In accordance with CFR 450.322(f)(7), the metropolitan transportation plan shall, at minimum, include a discussion of types of potential environmental mitigation activities and potential areas to carry out these activities, including activities that may have the greatest potential to restore and maintain the environmental functions affected by the metropolitan transportation plan. This discussion must expand beyond a general policy of avoidance, and consider other strategies and activities that may be used, in the case that environmentally or socially sensitive areas cannot be avoided. **The CRTPA needs to include a discussion of potential environmental mitigation activities in the 2040 RMP by December 31, 2017.**

Environmental Considerations

Transportation projects can significantly impact many aspects of the environment, including wildlife and their habitats, wetlands, and groundwater resources. In situations in which impacts cannot be completely avoided, mitigation or conservation efforts are required. Environmental mitigation is the process of addressing damage to the environment caused by transportation projects or programs. The process of mitigation is best accomplished through enhancement, restoration, creation, and/or preservation projects that serve to offset unavoidable environmental impacts.

The Capital Region Transportation Planning Agency (CRTPA) is committed to minimizing the negative impacts of transportation projects on the natural and built environment to preserve and enhance the regions quality of life. In Florida, environmental mitigation for transportation projects is completed through a partnership between the MPOs, FDOT, and State and Federal environmental resource and regulatory agencies, such as the Water Management Districts (WMDs) and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). These activities are directed through Section 373 Florida Statutes (F.S.), which establishes the requirements for mitigation requirements of habitat impacts. Under this statute the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) must identify projects requiring mitigation, determine a cost associated with the mitigation and place funds into an escrow account within the Florida Transportation Trust Fund. State transportation trust funds are programmed in the FDOT work program for use by the WMDs to provide mitigation for the impacts identified in the annual inventory of environmental impacts produced by FDOT.

Section 373.4137, F.S., establishes the FDOT mitigation program that is administered by the state's WMDs, which are responsible for developing an annual mitigation plan with input from Federal and State regulatory and resource agencies, including representatives from public and private mitigation banks. Each mitigation plan must focus on land acquisition and restoration or enhancement activities that offer the best mitigation opportunity for that specific region. The mitigation plans are required to be updated annually to reflect the most current FDOT work program and project list of a transportation authority. The FDOT Mitigation Program is a great benefit to the CRTPA because it offers an additional method to mitigate for impacts produced by transportation projects and it promotes coordination between federal and state regulatory agencies, the CRTPA, and local agencies.

When addressing mitigation, the general rule is to avoid all impacts, minimize impacts, and mitigate impacts when impacts are unavoidable. This rule can be applied at the planning level, when the CRTPA is identifying areas of potential environmental concern due to the development of a transportation project. A typical approach to mitigation that the CRTPA can follow is to:

- Avoid impacts altogether;
- Minimize a proposed activity/project size or its involvement;

Attachment 2

- Rectify the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment;
- Reduce or eliminate the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action;
- Compensate for environmental impacts by providing appropriate or alternate environmental resources of equivalent or greater value, on or off-site.

Florida Statutes require that impacts to habitat be mitigated through a variety of mitigation options, which include mitigation banks and mitigation through the Water Management District(s) and the FDEP. Potential environmental mitigation opportunities that could be considered by the CRTPA are listed in Table E-1.

Planning for specific environmental mitigation strategies over the life of the Connections 2040 Regional Mobility Plan (RMP) can be challenging. Potential mitigation challenges include lack of funding for mitigation projects and programs, lack of available wetland mitigation bank credits, improperly assessing cumulative impacts of projects, and permitting issues with the county, local, state and federal regulatory agencies. These challenges can be lessened when the CRTPA engages its stakeholders, including regulatory agencies, the public and other interested parties, through the public involvement process which provides the CRTPA with an efficient method to gain input and address concerns about potential mitigation strategies and individual projects.

Table E-1: Potential Environmental Mitigation Opportunities

Resource/Impacts	Potential Mitigation Strategy
Wetlands and Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restore degraded wetlands • Create new wetland habitats • Enhance or preserve existing wetlands • Improve storm water management • Purchase credits from a mitigation bank
Forested and Other Natural Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use selective cutting and clearing • Replace or restore forested areas • Preserve existing vegetation
Habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construct underpasses, such as culverts • Other design measures to minimize potential fragmenting of animal habitats
Streams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stream restoration • Vegetative buffer zones • Strict erosion and sedimentation control measures
Threatened or Endangered Species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preservation • Enhancement or restoration of degraded habitat • Creation of new habitats • Establish buff areas around existing habitat

Attachment 2

In addition to the process outlined in the Florida Statutes and implemented by the CRTPA and its partner agencies, the Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) process is used for seeking input on individual qualifying RMP projects allowing for more specific commentary and documentation. This provides assurance that mitigation opportunities are identified, considered and available as the plan is developed and projects are advanced. Through these approaches, the State of Florida and its MPO partners ensure that mitigation will occur to offset the adverse effects of proposed transportation projects.