

OKALOOSA – WALTON TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ORGANIZATION (TPO)

MEETING MINUTES

Chautauqua Building, 95 Circle Drive in DeFuniak Springs.

February 19, 2026

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Bobby Wagner, Chair	City of Destin
Todd Bierbaum, Vice Chair	City of DeFuniak Springs
J.B. Whitten	City of Crestview
Shannon Hayes	City of Crestview
Tracey Dickey	City of Freeport
April Sutton	City of Mary Esther
Doug Tolbert	City of Niceville
Drew Palmer	Okaloosa County Commission
Carolyn Ketchel	Okaloosa County Commission
Sherri Cox	Okaloosa County Commission
Christine Wasdin	City of Valparaiso
Donna Johns	Walton County Commission
Danny Glidewell	Walton County Commission
Tony Anderson	Walton County Commission
<u>Virtual Attendance</u>	
David Schmidt	City of Fort Walton Beach

MEMBERS NOT IN ATTENDANCE:

Doug Capps	City of Crestview
Torey Geile	City of Destin
Bryce Jeter	City of Fort Walton Beach
James T. Wood	MidBay Bridge Authority
Paul Mixon	Okaloosa County Commission

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Bryant Paulk	FDOT
Christy Johnson	FDOT
Bonnie Barlow	Fort Walton Beach Chamber
Scott Davidson	Hurlburt Field
Cory Wilkinson	HDR
Josh DeVries	HDR
Jeff Cozad	City of Destin
Kristin Shell	Okaloosa County
Ben Faust	DRMP
Ted Corcoran	Fort Walton Beach Chamber
Alex Blanco-Castano	Eglin Airforce Base
James Hoff	Eglin Airforce Base
Anthony Vallee	O-W CAC Member

Virtual Attendance

EMERALD COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL STAFF:

Kandase Lee
Tiffany Bates
Rae Emary
Jill Nobles
Tammy Neal
Leandra Meredith
Gabrielle McVoy

Virtual Attendance

Gary Kramer

CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE

Vice Chair Bierbaum called the meeting to order and chaired the meeting until chair Wager was able to join.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Commissioner Glidewell moved to approve the agenda as presented. Council Member Hayes seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

PUBLIC FORUM

Ted Corcoran, representing the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, addressed the board regarding the Around-the-Mound project and explained that he has attended many TPO meetings over the years advocating for the project and emphasized its importance to the City of Fort Walton Beach. He noted that a feasibility study was approved approximately four years ago and that the PD&E study was completed in December, identifying alternatives for the project.

Ted Corcoran stated that the Chamber, the City of Fort Walton Beach, and other partners support Alternative 1B. He explained that local governments have committed funding toward the design phase and asked that FDOT include its share of funding so the project can move forward. Ted Corcoran reiterated that the project would significantly benefit mobility and economic activity in downtown Fort Walton Beach.

Bonnie Barlow, Executive Director of Bridgeway Center and Chair of the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, also spoke in support of the project. Bonnie Barlow emphasized that the completion of the new bridge and continued development in the area make the Around-the-Mound project increasingly important. She highlighted the need for improved traffic circulation and emergency access, particularly during peak tourist season when congestion becomes severe. Bonnie Barlow encouraged the TPO and FDOT to continue prioritizing the project and to move forward with funding for the design phase.

FDOT UPDATES:

Bryant Paulk (FDOT) provided an update on a resurfacing project along Eglin Parkway from U.S. 98 to Richbourg Avenue. Bryant Paulk reported that the project began construction activities in mid-January and has a 600-day construction contract. He noted that the work will include roadway resurfacing as well as improvements to the bridge deck along the corridor.

During discussion, Commissioner Ketchel asked when visible construction activity would begin, noting that little activity had been observed to date. Bryant Paulk explained that the contractor is currently completing preliminary work and that construction crews would likely begin more visible work by the end of the month.

FDEP UPDATE-

Cassidy Haney, representing the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Greenways and Trails, provided an informational update regarding statewide trail initiatives. Cassidy Haney explained that the department recently completed updates to its regional trail corridor maps, which are reviewed every five to ten years. The updated maps identify trails that are planned, under design, or already constructed across Florida.

Cassidy Haney also discussed the U.S. 90 Trail Corridor, which spans approximately 434 miles across 17 counties from Escambia County to Duval County. She noted that the corridor is currently only about six percent complete. To advance the project, the department has begun organizing a U.S. 90 Trail Corridor Alliance, which includes monthly stakeholder meetings to discuss opportunities for expanding the trail network and closing gaps.

Cassidy Haney invited interested stakeholders and local governments to participate in the discussions.

CONSENT AGENDA:

- 1. ALL COMMITTEES: Approval of the November 2025 Meeting Minutes**
Mayor Whitten moved to approve the consent agenda. Council Member Sutton seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

ACTION ITEMS:

- 1. ENCLOSURE A - ALL COMMITTEES - ROLL CALL VOTE - Consideration of Resolution O-W 26-04 Amending the FY 2026-2030 Transportation Improvement Program to Add the Preliminary Engineering (PE) Phase for Valley Road from SR 10 (US 90) to Stillwell Boulevard, a Sidewalk Project, for Financial Project Identification (FPID) Number 4573561 in FY 2026/2027 at a Total Cost of \$180,237 - Bryant Paulk, AICP, FDOT**

Bryant Paulk presented Resolution O-W 26-04, which proposes amending the FY

2026–2030 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to add the Preliminary Engineering phase for a sidewalk project along Valley Road from U.S. 90 to Stillwell Boulevard in Crestview. The amendment includes Financial Project Identification Number (FPID) 4573561 and reflects a total cost of \$180,237.

Bryant Paulk explained that approval of the amendment would allow FDOT to execute the project agreement with the local government and begin work early in the upcoming state fiscal year. During discussion, Mayor Whitten stated that the corridor is frequently used by elementary school students and emphasized that the sidewalk project is an important safety improvement.

Council Member Hayes moved to authorize the TPO chair to sign Resolution O-W 26-04 and 25-16 amending the FY 2026-2030 Transportation Improvement Program. Commissioner Ketchel Dickey seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Councilmember Bierbaum Yes

Mayor Whitten Yes

Council Member Hayes Yes

Council Member Schmidt Yes

Council Member Sutton Yes

Council Member Tolbert Yes

Commissioner Palmer Yes

Commissioner Ketchel Yes

Commissioner Cox Yes

Council Member Wasdin Yes

Commissioner Johns Yes

Commissioner Glidewell Yes

Commissioner Anderson Yes

The motion was unanimously approved.

2. ENCLOSURE B – ALL COMMITTEES – Consideration of Resolution O-W 26-01 Approving the Okaloosa-Walton TPO 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Goals and Objectives - *Jill Nobles, ECRC Staff*

Jill Nobles presented the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Goals and Objectives. Jill Nobles explained that the LRTP is updated every five years and serves as the guiding framework for the region’s transportation planning efforts. The update process began in summer 2025 and includes extensive review of federal planning factors, state guidance, and regional and local plans.

Jill Nobles explained that the proposed goals and objectives build upon the previous

2045 LRTP and include categories such as safety and security, multimodal transportation, effective movement of people and goods, quality of life, efficiency, and the planning process.

Jill Nobles noted that the Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) recommended approval as presented and that the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) recommended adding language referencing local plans to one objective.

Council Member Sutton moved to authorize the TPO chair to sign Resolution O-W 26-01 approving the Okaloosa-Walton TPO 2050 LRTP Goals and Objectives. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Johns, and it was approved with Mayor Whitten opposed.

3. ENCLOSURE C – ALL COMMITTEES – Consideration of Resolution O-W 26-02 Approving the Okaloosa-Walton TPO 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Evaluation Criteria - *Jill Nobles, ECRC Staff*

Jill Nobles presented the evaluation criteria that will be used to score and prioritize projects during development of the LRTP Needs Plan and Cost Feasible Plan. She explained that the criteria are derived from the adopted goals and objectives and will help objectively evaluate potential transportation projects.

The proposed criteria maintain the same weighting categories used in the 2045 plan but clarify scoring methods and align the criteria with updated federal and state planning guidance.

Commissioner Palmer moved to approve the TPO Chair sign Resolution O-W 26-02 approving the Okaloosa-Walton TPO 2050 LRTP Evaluation Criteria. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Anderson, and it was approved with Mayor Whitten opposed.

4. ENCLOSURE D – ALL COMMITTEES – Consideration of Resolution O-W 26-05 Approving the Okaloosa-Walton TPO 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Financial Resources Technical Report - *Jill Nobles, ECRC Staff*

Jill Nobles presented the Financial Resources Technical Report for the Okaloosa-Walton TPO 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan, explaining that the report provides an overview of how transportation funding is distributed and identifies the anticipated revenue available to support projects through the year 2050.

Chair Wagner joined the meeting and took over as acting chair.

Jill Nobles reviewed the different funding sources used for transportation projects,

including federal and state funds, Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) funds, Surface Transportation Block Grant funds, Transportation Alternatives funds, and local funding sources. She explained how these sources are used to fund projects on SIS corridors, the state highway system, and other eligible roadways within the region. Jill Nobles also described the process used to estimate available revenues, including reviewing FDOT's adopted five-year work program and long-range funding projections.

Jill Nobles noted that the updated financial projections show approximately \$50 million less funding than was estimated in the previous LRTP update, reflecting changes in state funding projections and revenue estimates.

During discussion, Commissioner Ketchel asked why the projected funding available for transportation projects had decreased compared to the previous LRTP update. Bryant Paulk explained that revenue estimates are developed through the state's revenue estimating conferences, which occur twice each year. He noted that recent projections have been adjusted to reflect more realistic revenue expectations and that some funds previously available to the Department for transportation purposes were redirected by the Legislature to other areas.

Commissioner Ketchel expressed concern about the reduction and asked what actions could be taken to encourage the Legislature to increase transportation funding for the region, noting that the transportation needs in Okaloosa and Walton counties continue to grow. Bryant Paulk explained that the majority of state transportation funding is distributed based on population and miles traveled, which places the Florida Panhandle at a disadvantage compared to more populated areas of central and south Florida. He stated that the sixteen counties in FDOT District Three receive approximately 7.5 percent of the state's transportation funding.

Commissioner Ketchel commented that the region's transportation congestion continues to worsen and suggested that local governments and regional partners may need to advocate more strongly for additional funding through legislative channels and regional organizations. Additional discussion focused on potential changes to funding formulas and the broader issue of declining transportation revenue sources. A board member asked whether the shift toward electric vehicles and the resulting reduction in gasoline tax revenue could impact federal transportation funding in the future.

Bryant Paulk responded that many states and the federal government are evaluating user-based revenue models, such as mileage-based fees, to offset declining fuel tax revenues. However, he noted that the issue remains under discussion and that no specific solution has yet been adopted.

Commissioner Ketchel also raised concerns about the importance of transportation

infrastructure to support military installations in northwest Florida, suggesting that this could potentially strengthen the region's case when advocating for additional transportation funding.

Kandase Lee added that Congress is currently developing the next federal transportation reauthorization bill, stating that declining fuel tax revenues are a major issue being discussed nationwide and that many MPOs across the country are closely following the debate. Kandase Lee also noted that federal transportation funding has recently been supplemented with general revenue funds to offset declining fuel tax collections.

Council Member Bierbaum moved to authorize the TPO chair to sign Resolution O-W 26-05 approving the Okaloosa-Walton TPO 2050 LRTP Financial Resources Technical Report. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Glidewell, and it was unanimously approved.

5. ENCLOSURE E – ALL COMMITTEES – Consideration of Resolution O-W 26-03 Adopting the 2026 Transportation Alternatives (TA) Set-Aside Ranked Projects for FDOT District 3 Fiscal Year 2028 – 2032 Tentative Work Program - *Jill Nobles, ECRC Staff*

Jill Nobles explained that the Transportation Alternatives program provides funding for projects that support pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, trails, and other multimodal improvements. Local governments within the TPO area submitted project applications which were evaluated and ranked based on the TPO's adopted scoring criteria.

Jill Nobles stated that the ranked project list would be submitted to FDOT District Three for consideration during development of the upcoming Tentative Work Program. Jill Nobles noted that both the Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) and the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) reviewed the applications and recommended approval of the ranked list.

During discussion, Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel asked whether the scoring process considered the project's proximity to a school zone, noting that children frequently walk in the roadway in the area being discussed. Staff confirmed that school proximity is one of the evaluation criteria, explaining that projects receive additional points if they are located within one mile or two miles of a school. Staff also noted that projects may receive additional points under the location efficiency and connectivity criteria, particularly if they close gaps in existing sidewalk networks.

Commissioner Carolyn Ketchel asked whether the scoring process considered the project's location within a school zone, specifically referencing the Shalimar sidewalk project. Staff confirmed that school proximity is included in the scoring criteria and

that additional points may also be awarded through connectivity and location efficiency measures. Commissioner Ketchel emphasized that the project would improve safety for children who currently walk in the roadway. Another board member echoed the concern and noted that residents in the area had raised similar safety issues. Commissioner Ketchel asked how quickly the Shalimar project might move forward given that it ranked fourth. Staff explained that FDOT District Three receives approximately \$3 million annually in TA funding, which must be distributed across sixteen counties. Staff also noted that FDOT may sometimes fund individual project phases, allowing projects to move forward even if full funding is not immediately available.

Council Member Tolbert noted that the Palm Boulevard project in Niceville would connect areas serving the local high school and middle school complex, making it an important improvement for student travel.

Before the vote, Kandase Lee suggested that the motion could include a request that FDOT consider using any available urbanized area funding to supplement Transportation Alternatives funds if available, which could help advance one or more project phases.

Council Member Bierbaum moved to authorize the TPO chair to sign Resolution O-W 26-03 adopting the 2026 TA Set-Aside ranked projects for FDOT District 3 Fiscal Year 2028 – 2032 Tentative Work Program with the inclusion that FDOT consider using any available urbanized area funding to supplement Transportation Alternatives funds. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Anderson, and it was unanimously approved.

PRESENTATION ITEMS

1. ENCLOSURE F – ALL COMMITTEES – Schedule for Development of the Okaloosa-Walton TPO FY 2028-2032 Project Priorities - *Jill Nobles, ECRC Staff*

Jill Nobles presented the upcoming schedule for developing the FY 2028–2032 Project Priority List. Workshops will be held in March and April, with final adoption scheduled for the May 21 TPO meeting.

2. ENCLOSURE G- ALL COMMITTEES - Review of the Okaloosa-Walton TPO 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Draft Needs List- *Joshua DeVries, AICP, HDR Staff*

Joshua DeVries (HDR) presented the draft LRTP Needs List, which includes more than 500 projects identified through public input, stakeholder feedback, and review of local planning documents. Board members were encouraged to review the interactive

project dashboard and provide feedback prior to development of the Cost Feasible Plan.

3. ENCLOSURE H - ALL COMMITTEES- Review of Okaloosa-Walton TPO Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Trail Master Plan Update – *Joshua DeVries, AICP, HDR Staff*

Joshua DeVries presented an update on the Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Trails Master Plan, which focuses on expanding multimodal transportation options, closing sidewalk gaps, and improving connectivity across Okaloosa and Walton counties.

During discussion, Commissioner Johns raised several questions related to the growing use of electric bicycles and other micro-mobility devices. Joshua DeVries explained that while the master plan will include high-level recommendations regarding these devices, many of the regulatory decisions regarding their use on trails and pathways are determined through state statutes and local government policies. Cassidy Haney of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection noted that the use of certain classes of e-bikes may be permitted on trails depending on speed limits and state guidance, and that additional direction may come from the Florida Legislature in the future.

Board members also discussed pedestrian and trail safety, including the potential use of physical separation devices between roadways and pedestrian or bicycle facilities. One board member referenced safety treatments that have been installed in certain areas to help prevent vehicles from encroaching into walking and biking areas. Joshua DeVries explained that the master plan focuses primarily on identifying network needs and potential facility types, while specific safety treatments are typically determined during project design and implementation by local governments or FDOT.

Additional discussion focused on trail and sidewalk widths, with Council Member Sutton noting that in some residential areas pedestrians often walk in the roadway rather than on sidewalks because traditional sidewalks are too narrow for people walking side-by-side or pushing strollers. Joshua DeVries acknowledged that facility width and design often depend on the available right-of-way and surrounding conditions but stated that these considerations would be evaluated as projects move forward into more detailed planning and design.

Board members also discussed the importance of coordinating local trail networks with the SunTrail system and other regional trail initiatives to ensure connectivity across jurisdictions. Cassidy Haney noted that the SunTrail program continues to evolve and that state guidance regarding trail usage and policies may be updated as

legislation and statewide planning efforts progress. Board members also discussed local policy efforts to address safety concerns related to e-bikes and golf carts.

INFORMATION ITEMS (no presentation necessary):

1. TCC and CAC November 2025 Meeting Minutes
2. Amendment to the FY 2026-2030 TIP Letters
3. 2026 O-W TPO Meeting Schedule

OTHER BUSINESS: The next Okaloosa Walton Transportation Planning Organization meeting will be held on **May 21, 2026, at 3:00 p.m.** The CAC will meet at 9:30 a.m. and the TCC will meet at 1:30 p.m. All meetings will be held at the Chautauqua Building, 95 Circle Drive in DeFuniak Springs.