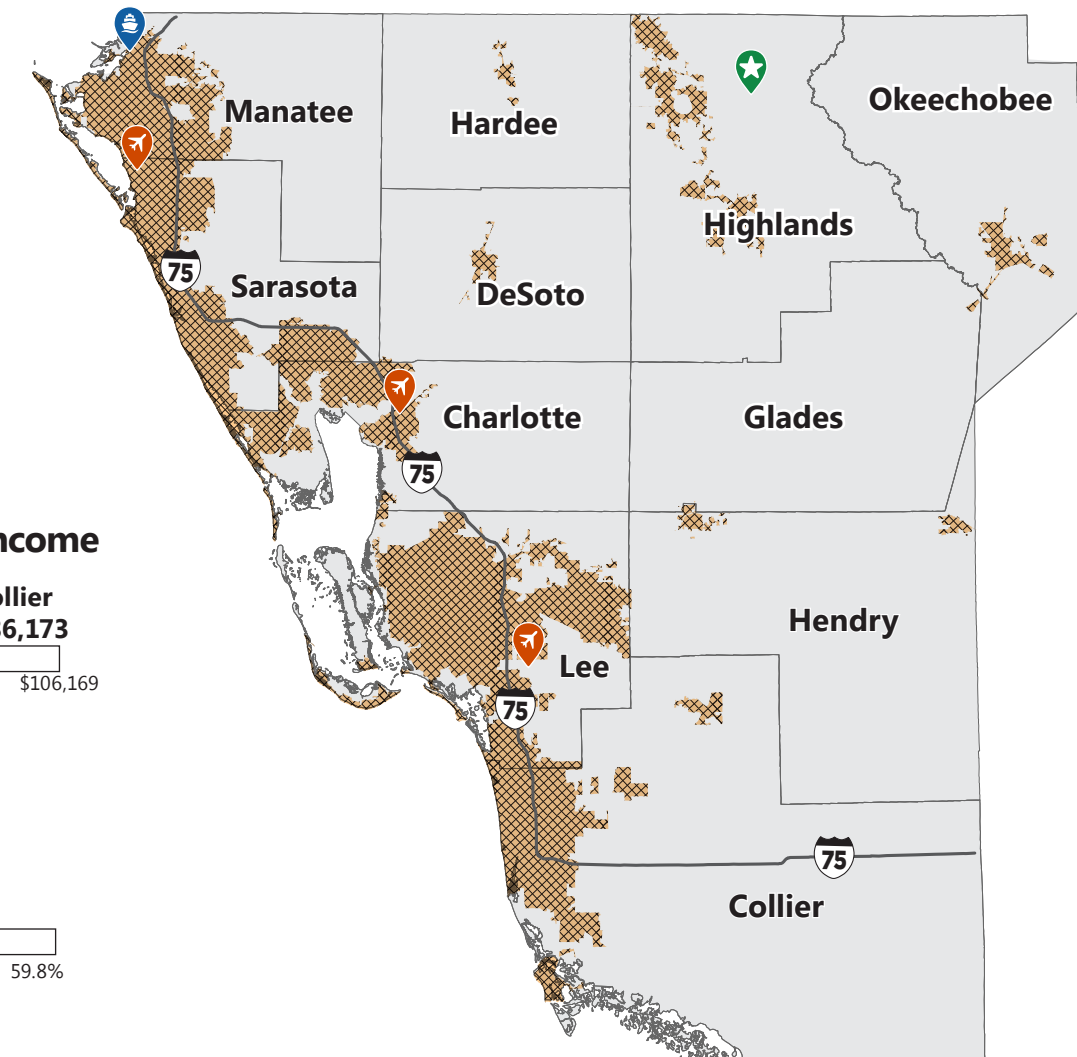
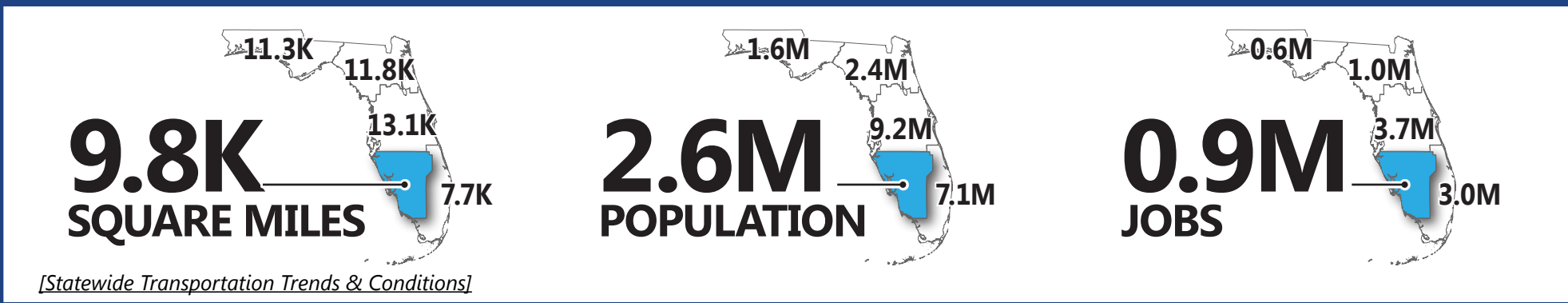


# SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

## TRANSPORTATION TRENDS & CONDITIONS

Florida's Southwest communities are comprised of two geographic areas. The first encompasses its coastal and largely urbanized counties, that host 90 percent of the region's population and serve as hubs for key industries such as retail, hospitality, and health services. The second area lies inland and is known as "the Heartland." It makes up 10 percent of the region's population and consists of more rural counties and characterized by agriculture and mining economies, though growing development pressures are beginning to push suburbanization into the area. Over the past decades, the Southwest has experienced rapid growth in urban areas, while some rural counties' populations have declined. The area is also increasingly aging, with a concentration of retirees settling inland and seasonal residents establishing second homes along the coast. Southwest communities continue to evolve, with a focus on increasing access to job opportunities and safe mobility for all users through future investments in roadways, transit, and technology.

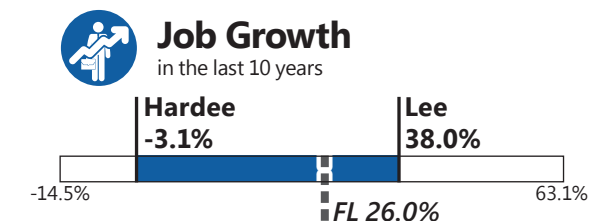
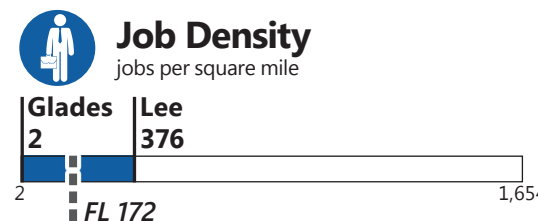
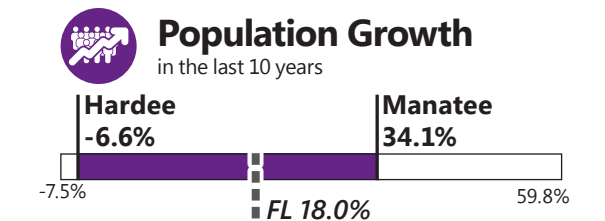
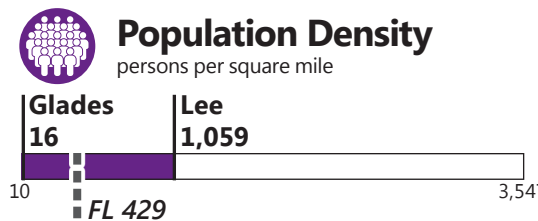
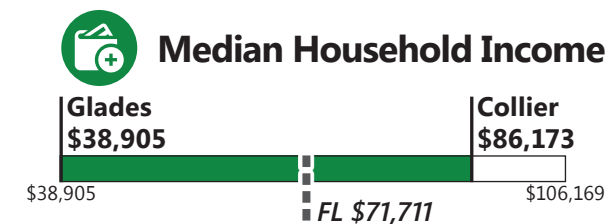
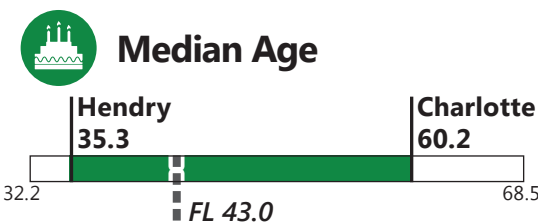


### TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM HIGHLIGHTS

- 17,320** Public Road Miles
- 279** Rail Mainline Miles
- 186** Existing SUN Trail Miles
- 1,935** Highway Bridges
- 6** Transit Systems
- 3** Commercial Service Airports
- 1** Seaport
- 1** Military Installation

### DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Reference scale bars represent the statewide range, highlighting the region's highest and lowest values.



Florida (FL) Median

*[Florida Transportation Fast Facts]*

*[Florida Trends & Conditions]*

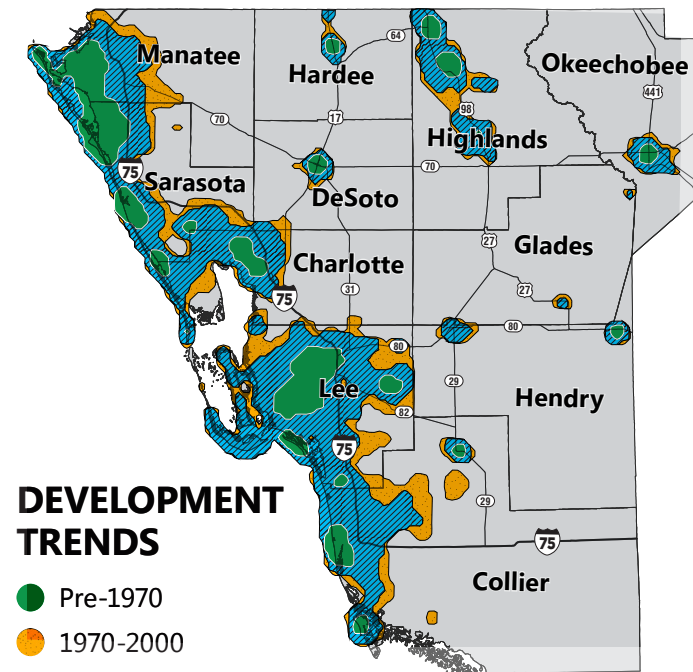
*[Sources]*

**DEVELOPMENT TRENDS**

**NEARLY 1M ACRES** representing 19% of the inland Southwest is designated as protected rural lands

Before 1970, the Southwest communities developed predominantly with **compact development patterns in coastal urban centers and rural towns** characterized by smaller block sizes and connected street networks. In the last five decades, development has been more **suburban, with low-density** and large-scale residential development slowly moving inland.

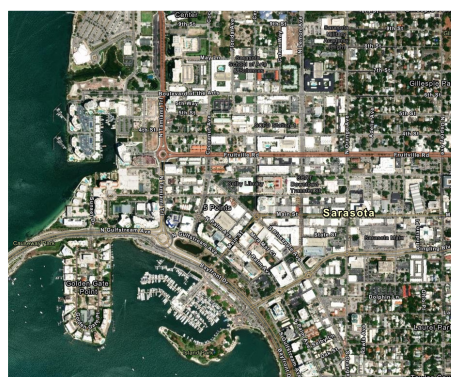
The area's recent developments have also clustered along the I-75 and U.S. 41 corridors, leveraging the high-speed and regional connections provided by these facilities. Growth in the coastal areas continues at unprecedented rates while remaining relatively stagnant inland, further accentuating the distinctions between the two geographic areas.



**DEVELOPMENT TRENDS**

- Pre-1970
- 1970-2000
- 2000-2020

Connected Roadway Network (Downtown Sarasota, FL)



Source: FDOT



Suburban Development (Manatee County, FL)



Source: FDOT

**GROWING & AGING COMMUNITIES**

**34%** of the 2050 population will be 65 years old or older

In the next 30 years, the Southwest communities will grow, adding 1 million residents and almost half a million jobs, with an increasing prevalence of aging populations and new suburban residential developments. Transportation infrastructure investments will need to address the communities' aging populations, as well as providing residents with multimodal access to health care and social services.



**Fast-Paced Growth & Development:** Much of the population and employment growth will occur along and east of I-75, converting more rural agricultural lands to suburban residential developments and industrial uses. Among the Southwest counties, Lee County is experiencing the most significant of this growth.

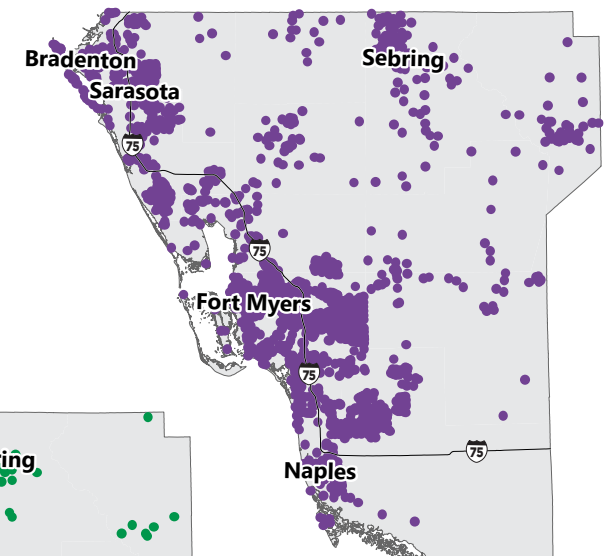


**Aging Communities:** Aging residents (65 years old and older) will outpace the growth of working age residents by 59 percent by 2050.

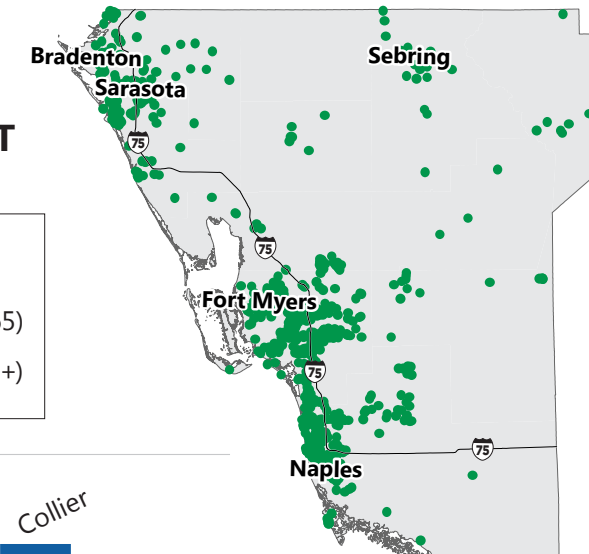


**Aging-Friendly Solutions:** The increase in the aging population will demand the expansion of safe, reliable, innovative, and accessible transportation options.

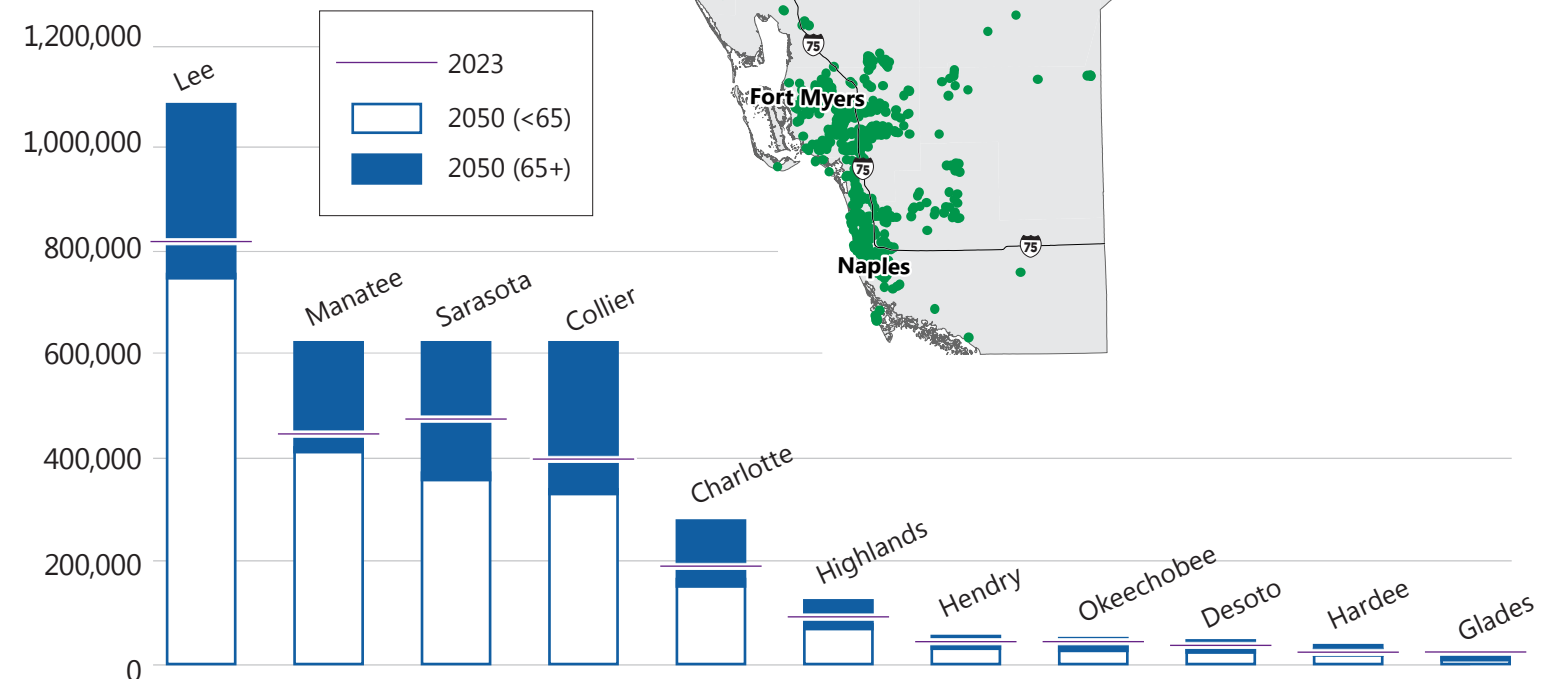
**30-YEAR RESIDENTIAL GROWTH**



**30-YEAR JOB GROWTH**



**2050 POPULATION FORECAST**



**INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS & RAPID DISASTER RESPONSE**

**34** modern roundabouts built or in design



**LEADING THE STATE IN PIONEERING SOLUTIONS**



Source: FDOT

FDOT installed **one of the first modern roundabouts on U.S. 17** and now has over 30 more built, in design, or planned. Roundabouts are emerging as a new default for safer intersection design, and Southwest Florida is leading the way.



Source: Seaport Manatee

**SeaPort Manatee** is the closest U.S. deepwater seaport to the Panama Canal, strategically positioned as a global trade hub served by interstates and a railroad. The port generates \$7.3 billion in annual economic impact and supports more than 42,000 jobs. The port recently received \$2 million in state grants to enhance South Dock Street, which connects the port to U.S. 41. The improvements will better accommodate heavy truck traffic and bolster the port's efficiency.



**HURRICANE & DISASTER RESPONSIVENESS**



Source: FOX News

After Tropical Storm Helene in 2024, FDOT reopened roads in Bradenton Beach in only three days. In 2022, after Hurricane Ian washed away areas along the three-mile Sanibel Causeway, emergency repairs were completed in just 15 days to reconnect the barrier islands to the mainland. FDOT, along with state and local partners, applied strategic and innovative techniques to rebuild the causeway and provide immediate access to over 6,000 residents.

The Southwest communities continue to focus on **addressing vulnerability to flooding** induced by extreme weather and increases in water levels.

- **Collier County** worked with the Army Corps of Engineers to identify coastal storm risk management solutions, including beach berm and dune nourishments, surge barriers, and floodproofing, among other measures.
- FDOT installed Wave Attenuation Devices along the southern end of the Sunshine Skyway to help prevent erosion.
- Three cities (Everglades City, LaBelle, and Moore Haven) and five counties (Collier, DeSoto, Glades, Hendry, and Highlands) partnered to secure \$1.6 million in state planning grants to develop or update **comprehensive vulnerability assessments** for their communities.

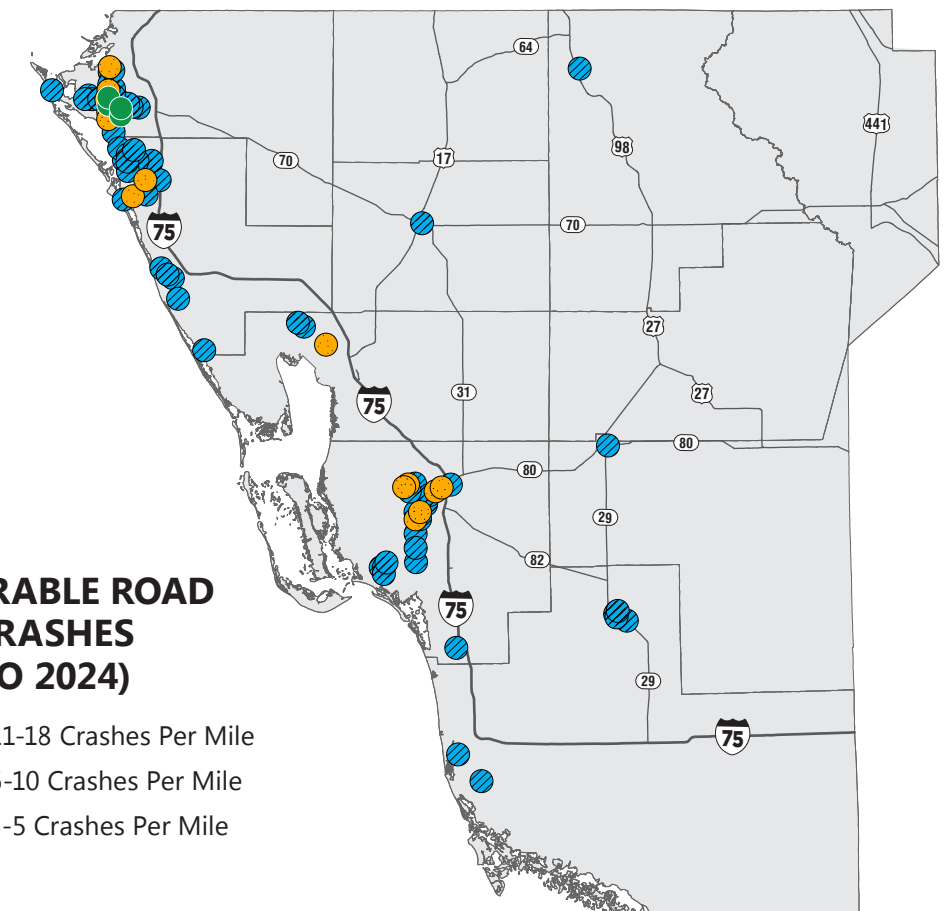
**ADDRESSING ROADWAY SAFETY**

**3%** 5-year decrease in pedestrian/bicycle fatal & serious injury crashes

The Southwest communities' aging demographic and high tourist activity have continued to heighten the challenges on their roadways. FDOT identified key roadway segments and areas that have the most fatal and serious injury crashes for people walking and bicycling. Together with regional partners, the department will prioritize improvements along these corridors to address safety challenges for the region's most vulnerable road users (VRU).

As part of the previous **VRU Safety Assessment**, FDOT identified some initial strategies along roadway segments with Tier 1 crash frequency:

- Add more **safe and accessible pedestrian crossings**.
- Manage **vehicular speeds** through roadway design.
- Launch pedestrian **safety education and awareness programs**.
- Utilize **technology** to improve multimodal safety (e.g., use of smart signals, automated pedestrian detection, etc.).



**VULNERABLE ROAD USER CRASHES (2020 TO 2024)**

- Tier 1: 11-18 Crashes Per Mile
- Tier 2: 6-10 Crashes Per Mile
- Tier 3: 3-5 Crashes Per Mile

**THE COAST CONTINUES TO BE THE ATTRACTION**

**4%** projected increase in tourism by 2035

To meet the transportation needs of the growing number of visitors and residents, the area will be investing heavily on:

- Improvements to multimodal access and safety**, such as the reFRESH Estero Boulevard project which caters to the influx of tourists to Fort Myers Beach.
- More transit connections**, such as between Southwest Florida International Airport and Downtown Fort Myers, as well as new inter-county connections such as a new bus route connecting the inland communities of Immokalee and Lehigh Acres.
- Continuous rebuilding of the economic engine of the area**, including FDOT's \$328 million investment in repairing and upgrading the Sanibel Causeway impacted by Hurricane Ian.
- FDOT District 1's **Congestion Management Multimodal Planning (C3MP) Initiative** supported the extension of the Bay Runner Trolley and Shared Bus Bike Shoulder during construction of the U.S. 41 and Gulfstream Roundabout.



**INVESTING IN THE HEARTLAND**

322,000 new residents  
147,000 new homes  
by 2050

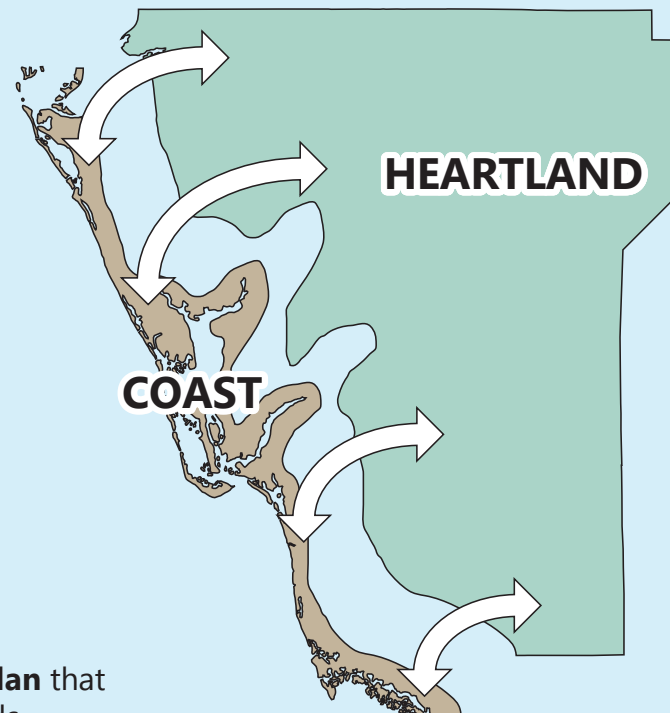
Made up of inland, non-metropolitan counties, the Heartland will see significant changes from the targeted transportation investments, including:

- Connecting rural homes and businesses not currently served by high-speed internet** through a \$23 million statewide grant for Southwest Florida to install high-speed fiber optic internet. Hardee County will receive the largest grant of \$7 million, and Arcadia in DeSoto County will receive \$4.9 million.
- Constructing a new, four-lane, \$85 million State Road 29** around downtown Immokalee as part of the **Moving Florida Forward Initiative**. This roadway will ease congestion, improve regional connectivity, and bring economic development.

**CONNECTING BARRIER ISLANDS & INLAND COMMUNITIES**

Stronger connections between the barrier islands and the inland communities will address travel demand and congestion while linking residents to jobs. These connections are critical to the Southwest communities' economic competitiveness. These multimodal strategies include:

- Multimodal mobility and safety** improvements (such as new bridges, counterflow options on existing bridges, and improved wayfinding) were recommended in FDOT's transportation management plan for the Sarasota/Manatee Barrier Islands.
- Transit solutions** will need to be part of the toolbox to address high travel demand from tourists and service industry workers traveling within, to, and from the barrier islands.
- Sarasota-Manatee MPO is preparing a **Barrier Island Implementation Plan** that will address critical infrastructure and mobility challenges on barrier islands.



**EVOLVING AGRICULTURE: DOING MORE WITH LESS**

Agriculture in Southwest Florida is changing as farmers face new environmental, economic, and land use pressures. Competition for land, labor shortages, and shifting weather patterns continue to challenge the industry. While traditional farming has declined in some areas, many producers are adapting through new technology, better management, and more diverse crops. These changes are helping farms stay productive and efficient even with limited land and resources. Overall, agriculture in the region is moving toward a more flexible and sustainable future that supports both the local economy and the environment—where, 25 years from now, it will do "more with less."



The Southwest communities constitute 14% of Florida's total land area yet **contributes 23%** of the state's agricultural product value.

