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3. Defining the Problem

3.1 Overview

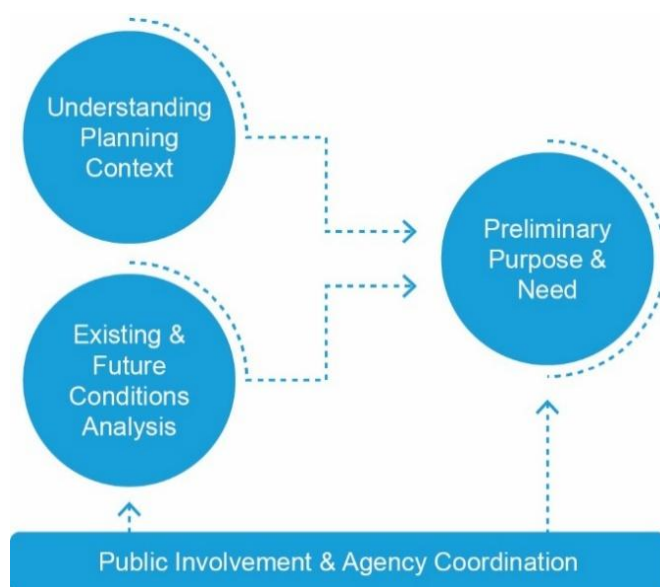
Project planning activities should begin by establishing a shared understanding of the transportation problem among agency stakeholders, the community, and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). Referred to as **defining the problem**, this first step aims both to understand the nature and extent of the transportation issue(s) and confirm that the issue is broadly recognized by community stakeholders as critical and a priority for action. The full definition of the transportation problem should build on the:

- ◆ **Understanding of the Planning Context:** Review and synthesis of previous and ongoing local, regional, or statewide planning efforts that are relevant to, and reference, the potential problem.
- ◆ **Existing and Future Conditions Analysis:** Establish the factual foundation for understanding the study area's issues and opportunities and clarify what transportation needs and potential improvements should be addressed.

There are instances when a transportation project is identified by an agency or documented in a planning document before the underlying transportation problem has been fully defined. Often, this occurs without the assessment of transportation needs or a public discussion of the importance of the problem. There may also be differing perspectives among stakeholders about the actual problem. In these cases, **it is the role of project planning, particularly the problem definition step, to use data-driven existing and future conditions analyses to document a clear understanding of the transportation needs and facilitate consensus among stakeholders on the nature of the transportation problem.**

The general steps for completing problem definition are shown in *Figure 3.1 Steps to Defining the Problem*.

Figure 3.1 Steps to Defining the Problem



3.2 Understanding the Planning Context

The planning context of a transportation project consists of prior plans and studies developed, and in some cases formally adopted, by local, regional, or state agencies. These prior efforts typically incorporate meaningful stakeholder and community engagement. Reviewing a project's planning context helps identify the **level of community understanding** and concurrence regarding the transportation problem and the need for action. In addition, the planning context provides insight into the **relative priority of the transportation problem** and how addressing the problem could **support a community's vision and goals**. The planning context also supports the development of a project's preliminary purpose and need and the project limits.

3.2.1 Statewide, Regional, and Local Plans

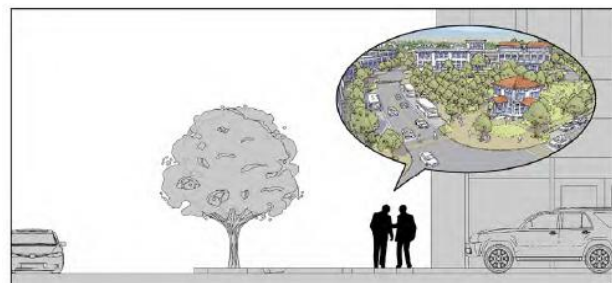
Section 1.3: Benefits of Conducting Project Planning Studies discusses how a project planning study is typically identified through statewide, regional, or local planning efforts. These plans provide the framework and rationale for the project, as well as the regional and local goals and priorities that will inform the planning process.

These transportation plans provide a starting point to understand a study area's current and future land use and transportation conditions and may indicate early community understanding and perception of the project. They also provide direction for, and can sometimes streamline, the existing and future conditions analyses) conducted as part of a project planning study.

Together with the existing and future conditions analyses, these prior plans can provide insights into the community's land use vision. This vision, in turn, informs the anticipated users of a roadway and its desired future role within the transportation system. Collectively, the land use vision, the anticipated users, and the desired role of the roadway, along with other traffic, safety, and engineering considerations, guide the development of the project's preliminary purpose and need and the identification, evaluation, and selection of project alternatives.

- ◆ **Land Use Vision:** Synthesized from regional and local plans, the land use vision **reflects the desired future land use pattern surrounding a roadway**. This may include the intended context (e.g., urban, suburban, rural, small town, etc.), the scale of planned growth, and the nature of future growth (e.g., remain a small town, increase residential density, increase employment opportunities, etc.). This surrounding planning context helps inform the corridor's existing and future function within the

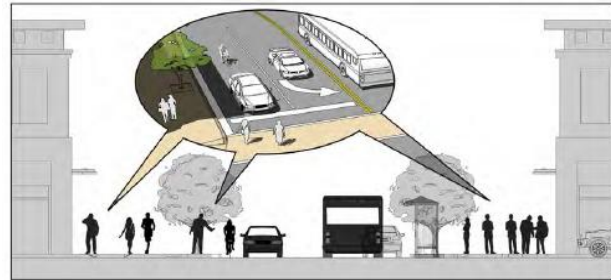
Figure 3.2 Land Use Vision



region, as well as the land uses along the roadway (e.g., employment center, residential enclave, neighborhood retail, regional shopping area, mixed-use development, etc.).

- ◆ **Major Users of the Roadway:** Based on the land use vision, coupled with the existing and future conditions analysis (see [Section 3.3: Existing and Future Conditions Analysis](#)), project planning can help **identify the current and future users of the roadway**. These users may include pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, freight traffic, and motorists. Users can also be characterized by major land uses and populations along the roadway (residents age 65 and older, students, tourists, businesses, employees, and other distinct populations). **An understanding of the existing and anticipated users helps determine the desired role of the roadway.**

Figure 3.3 Major Users of the Facility



- ◆ **Desired Role of the Roadway:** Based on the synthesized regional and local vision and goals for both the roadway and the broader study area, as well as an understanding of the roadway's primary users, the desired role of the roadway can be defined. For example, a roadway could function as a regional commuting corridor serving longer-distance trips and heavy freight traffic or as a local facility emphasizing shorter trips and multimodal activity, including walking and bicycling.

Figure 3.4 Desired Role of the Roadway



3.2.2 Related Transportation and Development Projects

Other ongoing transportation and land use efforts within and near the project area should be assessed. This includes recent, ongoing, and programmed studies or projects led by FDOT or local agencies. It also includes major planned developments (e.g., significant residential, commercial, or mixed-use projects) that may influence travel demand, access, or multimodal needs. Future traffic from these approved developments, as well as land use considerations for potential new developments, should be considered as part of future traffic analysis (See [Section 3.3.9: Traffic Forecasting](#)).

To support the review of related projects, **coordination with FDOT District planning staff and local agencies should occur to obtain prior studies, data, and documentation**. This coordination helps avoid duplication of prior technical work and supports consistency with other regional efforts.

For each identified project or plan, document at a minimum:

- ◆ Project name and description (including project number, if applicable)
- ◆ Location and limits (or area of influence)
- ◆ Current phase or status (planning, Project Development and Environment [PD&E], design, construction, completed, approved development, adopted plan)
- ◆ Anticipated or actual completion/implementation date
- ◆ Lead agency, owner, and developer

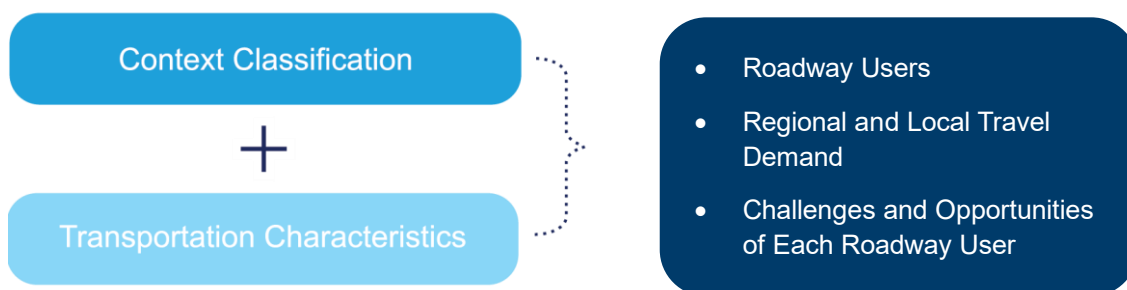
3.2.3 Roadway Context Classification and Identifying Roadway Users

The FDOT context classification system ([Figure 3.5 FDOT Context Classification](#)) identifies the existing (current) and future built environments in Florida. The [FDOT Context Classification Guide](#) provides guidance on how context classification can be used, describes the measures to determine context classification, and explains how context classification relates to concept design. Context classification is referenced throughout the [FDOT Design Manual \(FDM\)](#) and is **used to determine the applicable criteria and standards for all non-limited access state roadways**.

Identifying context classification during early project planning provides both information on the existing land use context and guidance for roadway typical section elements (e.g., lane widths, sidewalk widths, etc.) and parameters (design speed, speed management technique, etc.) during alternatives development. Each FDOT District has preliminary context classifications for state roadways developed through the Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis of a subset of the FDOT prescribed context classification measures (including roadway connectivity, population and employment density, and existing land use). As projects are scoped and/or advanced into Planning, PD&E, or Design, these preliminary context classifications are further refined by FDOT District planning offices using additional context classification measures (including building height, building placement, location of off-street parking, allowed residential and commercial densities, and future population and employment densities) and are updated to reflect the most current data available. For project planning studies, coordination with District planning staff should occur to request evaluation of the roadway's current and future (where available) context classifications, rather than relying on preliminary classifications.

Figure 3.5 FDOT Context Classification

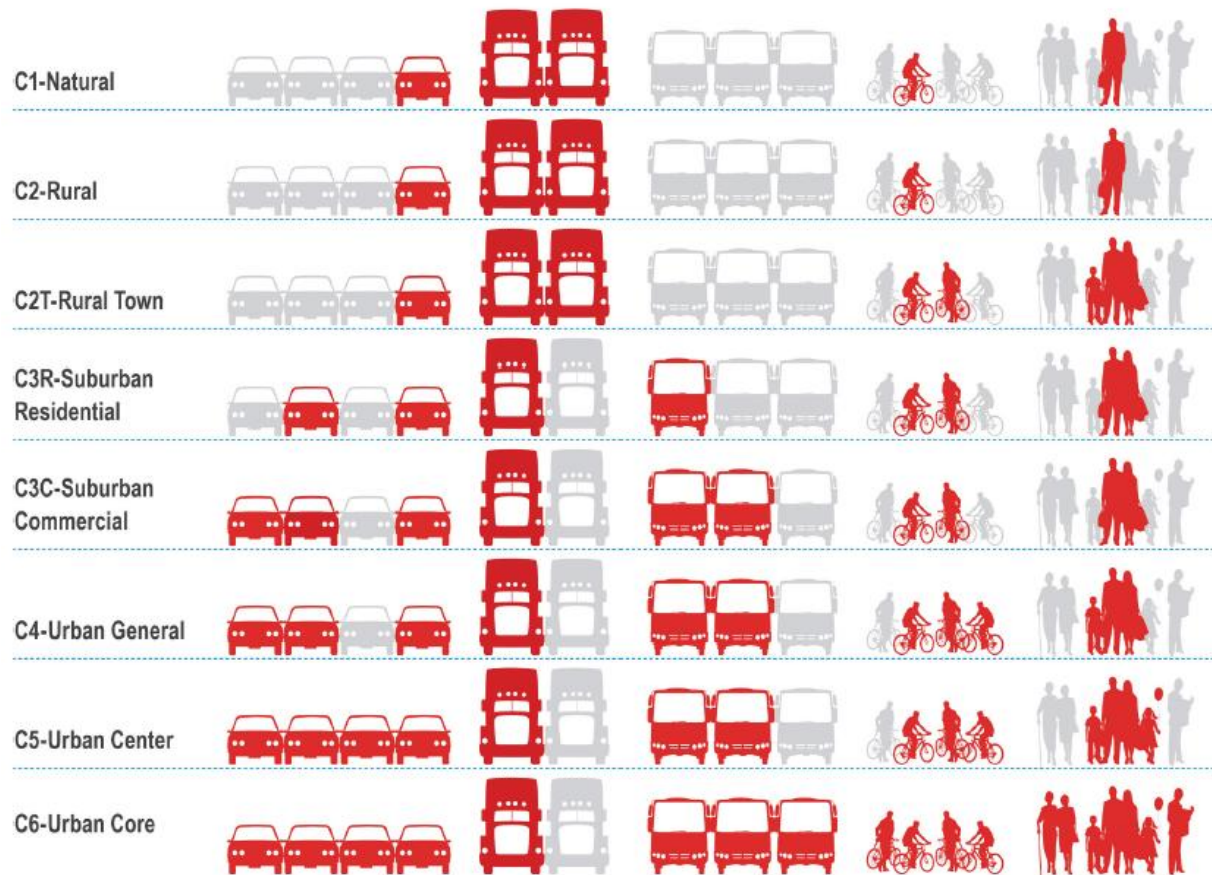
The context classification system can serve as a valuable tool to complement regional and local plans. As illustrated in **Figure 3.6 Context Classification's Role in Existing and Future Conditions Analysis**, a roadway's transportation characteristics (i.e., access management classification, freight activity, public transportation service, etc.) can be evaluated alongside its context classification to better understand how adjacent land uses influence transportation conditions. Together, these two factors provide insight into roadway users, travel demand, and the challenges and opportunities present for each user. These challenges and opportunities can include potential areas of improvement in roadway operations, facility design, site design, and land use integration. **Table 3.2** to **Table 3.6** provides example questions and analysis that leverage context classification and transportation characteristics to assess corridor conditions and identify potential challenges and opportunities.

Figure 3.6 Context Classification's Role in Existing and Future Conditions Analysis

Insights on existing and future users of the roadway and their needs, derived from context classification, can inform the development of project alternatives in subsequent phases of the planning process. For example, in an urban context classification (C4, C5, & C6) where a higher number of pedestrians and bicyclists are expected, slower design speeds, shorter spacing between pedestrian crossings, bicycle facilities, and wider sidewalks should be considered. The **FDOT Context Classification Guide** includes **Figure 3.7 Users by Context Classification**, which summarizes the various users that are typically

observed in each context classification. Context classification combined with other transportation characteristics is helpful in identifying corridor users, which is a critical component of an effective project planning study. Identifying corridor users is described further in [Section 3.3.8: Community Characteristics and Key Stakeholders](#).

Figure 3.7 Users by Context Classification



A comprehensive understanding of a corridor's planning context is informed by previously adopted and completed plans, recent and ongoing transportation and land development activities, and the roadway's context classification. This planning context provides the basis for strategically focusing additional existing and future conditions analyses, as outlined in the following section, to effectively define the transportation problem and determine a project's preliminary purpose and need. Additional guidance on defining the project purpose and need is provided in [Section 3.4.2 Defining Purpose and Need](#).

3.3 Existing and Future Conditions Analysis

The existing and future conditions analysis step is a foundational component of project planning. It involves focused, context-specific planning analyses, including engineering and environmental considerations, to **understand and document a corridor's issues and needs**. In contrast to the PD&E phase existing and future conditions analysis, where methodologies are prescribed by the FDOT PD&E Manual, project planning analyses **are scalable and can be tailored to the specific purpose, context, and complexity of the planning study**. The level of analysis should be sufficient to provide a reliable and defensible understanding of the transportation problem and inform the development and evaluation of potential solutions. For example, a project planning study typically does not need to gather data related to curb radii. However, if the focus of the study is related to freight/truck movements and access, it may be beneficial to collect this data.

The planning-level scale of analysis should provide enough detail to understand the nature and severity of the corridor's transportation problem, while avoiding extra data collection and analytical efforts that are not pertinent to understanding the corridor's context.

This section provides guidance and considerations to help ensure that data collection and analyses are appropriately focused, support more streamlined future project development, and inform decision-making throughout project planning. Analyses performed during project planning should produce information that can be adopted into the PD&E phase and where appropriate, reduce duplication of efforts (refer to [Section 2.3.2 Conditions for NEPA Adoption](#)).

Streamline Future Project Development

The existing and future conditions analysis must meet Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) requirements for adoption into the PD&E phase if alternatives analysis is completed during project planning and alternatives are eliminated.

3.3.1 Determining the Appropriate Type and Level of Analysis

Project planning analyses should be sufficiently reliable and defensible to:

1. Clearly define the transportation problem and establish the project's purpose and need,
2. Inform the development, screening, and evaluation of potential project alternatives, and
3. Advance analyses typically conducted in PD&E, where practical and beneficial, to expedite project implementation.

Flexible, Right-Sized Approach to Analysis

Analyses should be thoughtfully identified to best inform the project's key questions and to align with the scale and complexity of the project, with the understanding that not all analyses will be needed for every project.

The level of analysis should, at a minimum, be sufficient to achieve the first two of the above goals.

3.3.2 Study Area Characteristics

Building on the plans and project information obtained in [Section 3.2: Understanding the Planning Context](#), the study area characteristics should be outlined to develop the project description, including:

- ◆ County and municipality where the corridor is located; specify if the corridor is in an unincorporated area
- ◆ Project limits and the study area
- ◆ Other roadway classifications: scenic highway, evacuation route, Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) facility, etc.
- ◆ Connectivity to other regional transportation facilities
- ◆ Current and future land uses in the study area

3.3.3 Data Collection

Once the study area is defined, data collection should be initiated to support existing and future conditions analysis. **Data provide the foundation for all project planning level decision-making.**

Together with public and agency input, land use and transportation data inform existing and future conditions analysis, the definition of the preliminary purpose and need, and the development and evaluation of potential improvements. Strategic, efficient, and reliable methodologies, resources, and processes for obtaining information should be identified early in the project planning study, or even during scoping.

FDOT and its partners maintain a number of publicly accessible databases, dashboards, and data sources for use during data collection. These resources streamline data collection and support consistency across projects. FDOT leads statewide efforts to compile readily

available data for project planning. One of these key resources is the [FDOT Source Book](#), an interactive dashboard that provides multi-year historical data on a range of performance measures across Florida's state roadways. Additional resources include existing agency plans and reports, existing agency or publicly available data, field reviews, and information obtained through community and stakeholder engagement (See [Section 3.5 Public Involvement & Agency Coordination](#)).

These resources are summarized in [Table 3.1 Project Planning Data Sources](#).

Efficient Data Collection

Information gathering **should focus on defining the existing, future, and desired conditions of the project area** and on clarifying and justifying the need for, or constraints on, potential transportation improvements.

Regardless of project specifics, the emphasis should be on collecting and analyzing targeted information that addresses key uncertainties, informs critical decisions, and supports advancement to the next phase of project development, rather than accumulating large volumes of extraneous data.

Table 3.1 Project Planning Data Sources

Considerations	Potential Data Sources
Policy Considerations	- Statewide plans/legislative actions - Long range transportation plans/metropolitan transportation plans - Other regional plans and programs - Local plans and policy documents, including comprehensive plans
Financial Considerations	- Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Work Program - FDOT Work Program - Local government capital improvement programs - Other funding programs
Land Use Considerations	- FDOT Aerial photography through https://aplus.fdot.gov/ - Local government GIS mapping and databases - Parcel-level land use - Future land use - Zoning - Local government comprehensive plans - Local government permitted and planned development projects US Census Bureau demographics data (population, population density, age, race, income, etc.) Bureau of Economic and Business Research - Existing and projected population and employment Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) and Environmental Screening Tool (EST) data, including Area of Interest (AOI) Tool Florida Geographic Data Library
Transportation Considerations	- Aerial photography through https://aplus.fdot.gov/ - FDOT straight line diagrams and as-built documents - Available survey and right-of-way (ROW) maps US Census Bureau American Travel Survey and Longitudinal Employer-Housing Dynamics data (home locations of workers and work locations of residents) FDOT Source Book transportation performance data FDOT ConnectPed pedestrian counts FDOT Florida Traffic Online vehicular counts FDOT Signal4 crash data FDOT GIS Open Data Hub, including Roadway Characteristics Inventory (RCI) - District Safety Assessment Dashboard - Available intersection turning movement and roadway counts - Local government traffic signal timing plans - Transit agency route maps, stop locations, and ridership data - Available bicycle and pedestrian counts - Available micromobility vendor data (bike share and e-scooter) - Available origin-destination data (StreetLight, Replica, or other big data, typically purchased by an MPO or FDOT) - Regional traffic model or project-specific sub-area model

Project planning data collection should begin by clarifying what is already known from reviewing the planning context (see [Section 3.2: Understanding the Planning Context](#)) and what needs to be better understood about the study area. [Table 3.2](#) through [Table 3.6](#) provides information to help identify the appropriate data and analyses needed to **determine or refine the understanding of the transportation problem**. The need for custom, project-specific data collection should be driven by clearly defined data gaps critical to answering questions and informing the project's preliminary purpose and need.

The following sections outline the analysis topics typically included in the existing and future conditions analyses for project planning. [Table 3.2](#) through [Table 3.6](#) presents guiding questions under each topic to explore a corridor's existing and future conditions, along with potential analyses and data needed to answer those questions. Not all of the listed questions and analyses described will be applicable or needed for every project planning study. Sound engineering and planning judgment should be applied to determine the data needs and appropriate level of detail for each project. Additional data collection to support alternatives analysis is documented in [Chapter 4: Developing and Evaluating Potential Improvements](#).

3.3.4 Existing and Future Roadway Conditions

Document existing roadway conditions to establish how the facility is currently configured and operating and understand if there are gaps and challenges that need to be addressed. The existing and future roadway conditions data will also be used in the traffic analysis and forecasting as described in [Section 3.3.9 Traffic Analysis and Forecasting](#) and to evaluate potential alternatives as described in [Chapter 4: Developing and Evaluating Potential Improvements](#).

Table 3.2 Roadway Conditions Analysis and Data

Question to Understand Corridor Need	Analysis to Answer Question	Data to Perform Analysis
Do the existing physical conditions of the roadway meet current FDOT criteria for a safe roadway for all users?	Document existing roadway conditions; Determine if the roadway meets criteria or if improvements or a design exception/variance is needed	- Existing design speed and posted speed limit - Number and width of lanes, medians, shoulders, sidewalks, bike lanes/paths, buffers, curb type, landscaping, on-street parking, roadside protection (border width), and drainage swales or structures - Any atypical or constrained sections
Are there any safety concerns?	- Safety analysis - Identification of high-crash locations, patterns, and contributing factors - Crash rates and comparison to district or statewide averages where available	- Summary of crash history over the most recent five years - Crash frequency and severity by segment and intersection (e.g., heat map or other similar map is beneficial) - Crash types - District safety priorities
What is the role of the roadway within the study area?	Document FDOT or special classifications that influence criteria, standards, and operations	- Roadway context classification - Functional classification - Access management classification/standards - Special classifications - SIS corridor, evacuation route, Scenic Highway, etc.
How much ROW is available if there is a need to reconfigure the roadway?	Document ROW constraints	- Typical ROW widths - ROW limits - Ownership, easement, and type of limited-access control (if appropriate)
Is there a likely maintenance, pavement, or structural condition issue that needs to be addressed?	Document pavement and structural conditions; Document general geotechnical conditions	- Pavement conditions and type - Structural condition (e.g., Florida bridge inventory and quarterly bridge information (bridge conditions), observed distresses) - Operational condition (e.g., friction, ride quality) - Soils map depicting general soil classifications and any notable geotechnical issues affecting performance or constructability
Does existing horizontal and vertical geometry contribute to safety problem?	Document existing roadway geometry and whether design criteria are met or potentially contributing	- Crash data through and on approach to curves - Description of curves, grades, and transitions - Identification of substandard features and constraints (e.g., limited sight distance, sharp curves)
Do existing lighting conditions support safe nighttime operations for all users?	Identify general lighting coverage, known deficiencies or gaps	- Lighting location (example: side of road) - Typical lighting type (high mast, cobra head, decorative), typical spacing, and general condition of lighting - Nighttime crash locations

3.3.5 Multimodal Facilities

Document existing and planned multimodal facilities and services to understand how the system is currently configured and operating across modes (pedestrian, bicycle, transit, freight) and to **identify missing links, safety issues, capacity constraints, redundancy, and opportunities to enhance connectivity or access**. The multimodal conditions data will also be used in the traffic analysis and forecasting as described in [Section 3.3.9 Traffic Analysis and Forecasting](#) and evaluate potential alternatives in [Chapter 4: Developing and Evaluating Potential Improvements](#).

Table 3.3 Multimodal Facilities Analysis Data

Question to Understand Corridor Need	Analysis to Answer Question	Data to Perform Analysis
What is pedestrian, bicycle, public transportation, and freight traffic and infrastructure like currently and in the future? Do existing multimodal facilities meet the future or current needs of users?	- Document and/or map existing multimodal facilities - Level of traffic stress analysis	- Shared use path or sidewalk presence and continuity, width/Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility, buffer, and crosswalk locations and type (marked/unmarked, signalized, high-visibility, and school crossings) - Bicycle facility type (bike lane, shared use path, shoulder), width, continuity, and connectivity to local/regional networks - Transit ridership, routes, stops, station locations, shelters, transfer centers, park-and-ride lots, bus bays, and key service characteristics - Designated freight routes, access to intermodal logistics centers, terminals, industrial areas, freight restrictions, loading zones, and truck parking facilities
Are there key destinations not currently served by low-stress multimodal facilities, as defined in the FDOT Multimodal Quality/Level of Service Handbook?	Identify gaps in comfortable, low level of traffic stress multimodal facilities near key destinations	- Key destinations - School walksheds - Pedestrian desire lines (direct path between destinations)
Does the corridor have a railroad and how does it impact corridor operations?	- Document and map railroad locations - Analyze impacts on corridor traffic operations	- Railroad owner, number and location of at-grade and grade-separated crossings - Number of tracks, train frequency, and train speeds - Type of service (passenger, freight, or mixed) - Existing warning devices and control systems
Are there other modes (golf carts, micromobility, emerging vehicle technologies, etc.) that need to be considered in this area?	Document presence and use of emerging or locally significant modes	- Golf cart usage/observed routes - Micromobility usage patterns - Local ordinances or designated facilities

3.3.6 Existing Bridge and Structure Conditions

FDOT Structures Maintenance Office maintains a statewide, quarterly bridge information report summary online, based on annual inspections that provides a list of existing bridge locations and their inspection condition. Additionally, detailed Bridge Inspection Reports (BIR) are available for every public bridge in the State of Florida. The District Maintenance Office should be contacted to obtain the most recent BIR for each bridge on the corridor when detailed bridge conditions are needed to verify the structural condition.

Table 3.4 Existing Bridge and Structure Conditions Analysis and Data

Question to Understand Corridor Need	Analysis to Answer Question	Data to Perform Analysis
Does the corridor have an existing bridge? Does the bridge meet current design standards?	Document typical section of existing bridge	Typical section (lanes, shoulders, sidewalks, bike facilities, railings/barriers)
Does the bridge meet current structural standards? Can it handle additional load?	Document maintenance needs	- Year built and years of major modification or rehabilitation - Inspection ratings, condition assessments, and deficiencies - Load posting and load rating information - Existing borings, pile driving records, and foundation details - Maintenance and repair history relevant to structural integrity
Does the bridge meet the needs of its original function?	Evaluate functional performance of the structure relative to current and projected conditions	- Facility crossed (roadway, waterway, railroad) - Channel alignment, width, depth, and navigation clearance requirements - Vertical and horizontal clearances over and under the structure - Vessel or ship impact considerations - For movable spans: frequency of openings, boat traffic characteristics, mast height data, and special navigation requirements during construction - Normal High Water, Mean High Water (for coastal or tidal facilities), and related design water levels as defined in the FDOT Design Manual and Drainage Manual
Does the bridge have a special designation with additional requirements? Are there known security issues?	Vulnerability screening	- Historic designation or other cultural significance, if known - Known security issues or vulnerabilities that could affect project design, construction staging, or operations

The existing bridge and structures conditions data will be used to inform the project need as described in [Section 3.4.3.3 Step 3 – Compile Data to Support Need](#) and the scope for the next project phase (PD&E or Design).

3.3.7 Environmental Characteristics

In general, the purpose and need should focus on the underlying transportation problem, including the reason(s) the project is being proposed. In limited circumstances, an environmental resource may be integral to the purpose and need. For example, a historic bridge that requires additional capacity may necessitate a purpose and need that explicitly addresses preservation of the historic resource as well as the transportation deficiency. Avoidance and minimization of environmental resources are typically addressed during the alternatives analysis, as described in [Section 4.2: Alternatives Analysis](#).

When defining the problem, the project planning study should briefly summarize the environmental characteristics of the study area, focusing on the environmental context of the surrounding area. Identifying and summarizing environmental features within and near the study area provides sufficient information to identify environmental constraints and the affected environment, determine whether any fatal flaws exist that could support eliminating alternatives, and support environmental screening conducted during alternatives analysis. Early documentation of environmental characteristics also helps identify which environmental issues are applicable and the appropriate level of detail for environmental analysis, based on the understanding of environmental features. These environmental characteristics will be used when evaluating alternatives, as described in [Section 4.2: Alternatives Analysis](#), and to inform ETDM screening and the scope for the next project phase (PD&E or Design). As described in the [ETDM Manual](#), the ETDM AOI tool provides data, summary reports, and analysis of environmental information for use in the planning study and subsequent project phases.

3.3.8 Community Characteristics and Key Stakeholders

Community characteristics should be documented early in the planning process to establish **who the project serves and what community resources may be affected**. Much of the community characteristics data can be obtained from the Sociocultural Data Report provided by the ETDM Planning and/or Programming Screen.

Table 3.5 Community Characteristics and Key Stakeholders Analysis and Data

Question to Understand Corridor Need	Analysis to Answer Question	Data to Perform Analysis
Who are the predominant users of the corridor based on the land uses served?	Identify primary user groups and trip generators influencing corridor demand	- Major employment centers - Schools and institutional uses
Who lives and travels in the study area?	Map demographic characteristics for an appropriate buffer around the planned improvements (e.g., approximately 1 mile in rural areas and ¼ mile in urban areas)	- US Census or American Community Survey (ACS) data: population total and density; age distribution, income, vehicle ownership, disability status, languages spoken, and other factors relevant to transportation needs - Distinct population groups and any notable areas in or near the project corridor where these groups are more highly concentrated.
What type of land uses and communities are being served by the corridor? Are these conditions expected to remain in the future? Are there land uses that require special considerations?	Document and map existing and future land uses within the project area	- Context classification - Existing land use - Future Land Use - Zoning - Planned and permitted development - Local designations (commuter corridor, tourist area, freight-oriented corridor, transit-dependent community, etc.)
What aesthetic or streetscape features identify the community?	Document project area aesthetic features	Landscaping, street trees, decorative lighting, street furniture, specialty paving, and other visual/urban design elements
How do people currently move around the project area?	Document and map modal choices	- Identify available travel modes, including use of personal vehicles, walking, bicycling, micromobility, and other modes. - Current commute mode choice from ACS
What resources are important to daily life and travel?	Document and map community resources	- Schools and major education facilities. - Community and civic facilities (e.g., community centers, libraries). - Parks, recreation areas, and notable cultural or historic destinations. - Hospitals, major clinics, and significant social service facilities. - Government and public safety facilities. - Major employment and commercial centers. - Multimodal facilities (e.g., transit hubs, park-and-ride lots, intermodal facilities).

Question to Understand Corridor Need	Analysis to Answer Question	Data to Perform Analysis
What groups should be engaged throughout the project?	Document special interest groups and key stakeholders	- Neighborhood or homeowner associations - Business groups - Advocacy organizations - Major institutions - Freight or industrial interests
What are the local comprehensive plan policies or other goals and objectives related to this project?	Review and synthesize applicable local plans, policies, and goals	- Local vision, plans, and policies, including comprehensive plans - Local capital improvement programs
What are the regional priorities related to this project? Are there any federal or statewide regulations or policies related to this project?	Identify relevant regional, statewide, and federal policies	- Regional Long Range Transportation Plans - Statewide plans/legislative actions - FDOT Work Program

Documenting community characteristics will help inform how a potential solution may address community needs and the future vision for the community. Community characteristics can help identify user needs, such as improving access to schools or parks, and therefore influence the project's purpose and need, alternatives analysis, and recommendations.

The community characteristics and key stakeholders will also be used to inform public engagement activities as described in [Section 3.5 Public Involvement and Agency Coordination](#) (and particularly [Table 3.9 Key Aspects of Public Involvement When Defining the Problem](#)) and to understand sociocultural effects as part of the alternatives analysis as described in [Section 4.2 Alternatives Analysis](#).

3.3.9 Traffic Analysis and Forecasting

As with the other existing and future conditions analyses, **traffic analysis and forecasting help define the problem and establish the project's purpose and need**, including whether a traffic-related problem exists. During project planning, traffic data and analysis can also support the evaluation of alternatives and selection of a recommended solution.

The level of analysis and forecasting needed in project planning will vary based on the complexity and scale of the planning effort. For a corridor not anticipated to require additional capacity to meet future demands, analyzing segment-level Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) may be sufficient to rule out roadway widening as a need, without further analysis of intersection operations and forecasting traffic at the level of intersection turning movements. For more complex projects, where advanced traffic analysis can help clarify a problem and inform alternatives evaluation, typical PD&E-level analyses may

be warranted during project planning. In such cases, these analyses should be adopted into the PD&E phase, reducing duplication and streamlining project development. For example, planning for a fast-growing corridor with known peak-period congestion would benefit from detailed intersection operations analysis under both existing and future conditions.

Data collection for traffic analysis should follow the methodologies outlined in the [FDOT Traffic Analysis Handbook](#). While [Section 3.3.5 Multimodal Facilities](#) focuses on the existing infrastructure for different transportation modes, data collection for traffic analysis should consider how well people are able to travel throughout the study area today and in the future.

Future traffic volumes are necessary to understand if existing vehicular capacity can accommodate anticipated future traffic demands and to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of project alternatives. Traffic forecasts should consider planned and programmed transportation improvements, historic growth estimates, future land use projections and assumptions, and other relevant traffic parameters. When forecasting is included as part of project planning, a project-specific forecasting methodology should be developed in coordination with the FDOT District and based on the [FDOT Traffic Forecasting Handbook](#).

The level of effort for traffic analysis during project planning must account for the PEL requirement that planning information be **based on reliable and reasonably current data and the planning product to be adopted into the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis is not more than five years old (from the date the product was approved or completed)** or the information needs to be reviewed to determine if the planning context has changed, as summarized in [Section 2.3 Incorporating Planning into PD&E](#). For future project development that will involve interchange access requests, a re-evaluation of supporting data and analyses is required if the interchange improvement does not progress to the Construction phase within five years of approval, as documented in the [FDOT Interchange Access Request User's Guide](#). Other considerations that may affect the validity of traffic forecasts and analysis include substantial changes in land use, socioeconomic conditions, scope of work, related projects in the surrounding roadway network, or changing traffic conditions reflected in the regional travel demand model. More detail on how these conditions may require updated traffic analysis during PD&E is documented in the [PD&E Manual, Part 2, Chapter 2, Traffic Analysis](#). The level of effort for traffic analysis during project planning should consider these potential risk areas to avoid duplication of effort between project phases.

Table 3.6 Traffic and Travel Analysis and Data

Question to Understand Corridor Need	Analysis to Answer Question	Data to Perform Analysis
What is the existing travel demand for all modes along the corridor? Is traffic different at different times of the day or week?	Document and map existing volumes	- AADT by segment - Directional distribution, where available - Peak-hour turning movement counts at key intersections - Truck percentages and heavy vehicle characteristics - Bicycle and pedestrian counts
How are vehicles operating in the project area? Are there key intersections where congestion is more pronounced?	All day and peak period traffic analyses	- Intersection control/forms (signalized, unsignalized, roundabouts, interchanges) - Lane configurations, including turn lanes, auxiliary lanes, and channelization - Observed operational issues (queues, delays, spillback, weaving problems) - Existing Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) and signal technologies (e.g., detection, coordination, transit priority, preemption)
What is the future travel demand?	Travel demand forecast	- Travel demand model - Historic traffic trends - Population projections - Planned developments, zoning, and future land use
What are common vehicle travel patterns? How are people moving (local vs regional)?	Document and map vehicle trip patterns	- Typical trip lengths - Dominant origin-destination pairs
What are the posted speeds, and how fast are vehicles operating currently?	- Document posted speed, design speed, target speed - Speed study	- Design speed, target speed, and posted speed limits - Notable locations where operating speeds differ significantly from design or posted speeds

3.3.10 Documenting the Analysis

Results from the existing and future conditions analysis should be **documented in easy-to-understand formats that can be understood by the public and decision-makers**. Data tables, charts, graphics, maps, and other visualization tools should be used to succinctly convey findings and to clearly document the corridor's transportation needs.

For project planning, base maps can be used to display data collected, illustrate project needs, and frame concepts of project alternatives in later phases (See [Chapter 4: Developing and Evaluating Potential](#)

Improvements. Aerial imagery, topographic mapping, and survey data should be used where available and aligned with FDOT's standards and coordinate system as described in [**FDOT Survey and Mapping Handbook**](#).

With advances in digital media and visualization tools, base maps, tables, charts, and other data can be shared through online dashboards and platforms to support engagement with stakeholders and the public. Any online summaries of data analysis should be documented in a report or memo format that clearly explains the results, to satisfy PEL requirements.

3.4 Developing and Refining the Project Purpose and Need

Building on the results of the existing and future conditions, the project's purpose and need can be developed. The purpose and need for the project forms the foundation for project development by clearly articulating **why the project is necessary** and **what it is intended to achieve**. The proposed transportation improvements are then developed to address this purpose and need. It serves as a critical planning product to support any PD&E Study by explaining the rationale for the project and establishing a benchmark against which project alternatives are evaluated.

Developing and documenting the purpose and need in a project planning study helps focus the study on the overarching project's goals and objectives while strengthening the link between planning decisions and succeeding project phases. Providing a well-defined purpose and need during project planning can reduce the amount of time spent on purpose and need refinement during the PD&E phase.

The purpose and need also serves to:

- ◆ **Frame the focus** of the Project Planning Study, ETDM screening, and PD&E.
- ◆ Provide the **basis for identifying, developing, evaluating, and eliminating alternatives**.
- ◆ **Connect the project to the transportation planning process**, including Metropolitan/Transportation Planning Organization (MPO/TPO) LRTPs, the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), and other plans.
- ◆ **Link the project to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969**, consistent with [23 CFR § 450 Appendix A](#) (*Linking the Transportation Planning and NEPA Processes*), which states that the planning document must describe "how the purpose and need was developed and refined" for it to be incorporated into the NEPA process.

Effective Purpose and Need Statements

A good purpose and need statement is project specific and clearly explains why a project is being proposed and is needed.

A well-developed purpose and need can help focus limited resources on **the most significant transportation problems** the project is intended to address and improve the **defensibility** of project decisions in agency review and in any potential legal challenge. This section of the Manual explains how to develop and refine a project-specific purpose and need statement during a project planning study, by using available planning documents, technical analyses, and transportation plans. More details on developing a project purpose and need can be found in the [PD&E Manual, Part 2, Chapter 1, Project Description, Purpose and Need, and Planning Consistency](#).

3.4.1 Applicability for Project Development

The preliminary purpose and need for a project begins in the Planning phase (e.g., project planning study) and can be refined during the PD&E phase. During planning, the preliminary purpose and need statement is used in the ETDM Planning and Programming Screens for qualifying projects. FDOT uses the ETDM process to obtain input from resource agencies on the purpose and need for projects that are screened through the EST. This information from the ETDM Programming Screen Summary Report is used to prepare the purpose and need statement for the NEPA environmental document.

During the PD&E phase, the purpose and need is refined, as needed, based on any changes in transportation plans or updated studies. The preliminary purpose and need developed during project planning will be reviewed and accepted by FDOT Office of Environmental Management (OEM) during the ETDM Programming Screen to determine if the data and analyses supporting the need are still valid and if the needs require updates based on current data (traffic, safety, or existing conditions). Under the NEPA Assignment Program, FDOT OEM provides purpose and need acceptance for federal highway projects.

The purpose and need should not change substantially between the ETDM Programming Screen and PD&E phases of a project. If substantial changes to the purpose and need statement occur, FDOT OEM consultation is required. FDOT OEM guidance on preparing the project description and purpose and need for the project, prior to and during the PD&E phase, is summarized in the [PD&E Manual, Part 2, Chapter 1, Project Description, Purpose and Need, and Planning Consistency](#).

3.4.2 Defining Purpose and Need

Key characteristics of the purpose and need include:

- ◆ A **statement of the transportation problem**, not a description of a specific solution.
- ◆ Based on agreed upon **data analyses and assessment methodologies** through a recognized planning process.
- ◆ Broad enough to encompass a **range of alternatives**, yet specific enough to focus analysis.
- ◆ Must **not** list specific design criteria or standards.
- ◆ May reflect **other secondary goals and objectives** identified in Federal, state, local, or tribal plans or through data analyses (for example, environmental resources, growth management, land use planning, economic development), as long as it remains focused on the transportation problem.
- ◆ Supports the evaluation of alternatives (including no-action or no-build) and **alternative(s) for analysis in the PD&E phase**.

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Guidance on Purpose and Need

FHWA Technical Advisory T6640.8A states the purpose and need will “identify and describe the proposed action and the transportation problem(s) or other needs the project is intended to address.”

3.4.2.1 Defining the Project Purpose

The project purpose identifies the **primary goals of the project** and provides the **reason why** FDOT or a transportation agency is proposing a project. **The purpose is not the statement of solution.** It states what transportation problem(s) the project intends to address and provides the basis for developing and evaluating alternatives.

Acceptable v. Unacceptable Purpose Statements:

- ◆ **Acceptable:** The purpose of the project is to improve safety and reduce the frequency and severity of crashes along State Road 50 while maintaining acceptable traffic operations.
- ◆ **Not acceptable:** The purpose of the project is to widen State Road 50 from four to six lanes. (This improperly embeds a solution.)

3.4.2.2 Defining the Project Need

Based on the results of the existing and future conditions analysis, the project need is the **factual, objective description of the existing or forecasted transportation problem(s)** that support the purpose of the project. Unlike the purpose, which states the overarching goal (what we want to achieve with the project), the project need describes the specific issues driving the project.

The project need arises from **deficiencies, issues, or concerns** that exist, or are expected to occur, in the project area within a specified timeframe (which may vary from one project to another). These existing, or anticipated, issues also form the foundation for the purpose and need and the **no-action (or no-build) discussion** and should be supported by **measurable evidence, data, and analysis**, summarized in plain language.

Transportation needs typically fall into one or more categories as described in [Section 3.4.3.2: Step 2 – Identify Transportation Problems \(Needs Element\)](#) and identified in the [PD&E Manual, Part 2, Chapter 1, Project Description, Purpose and Need, and Planning Consistency](#).

Considerations in Determining Needs

- ◆ What are the true “drivers” of the project?
- ◆ How is the need for this project distinct from the need for other similar projects that are being proposed in the same region?
- ◆ What is the justification for this project over other transportation priorities?
- ◆ Are the project purposes achievable?

No-Action or No-Build

The No-Action Alternative (or No-Build Alternative) serves as the baseline or benchmark against which the Build Alternatives are evaluated. The No-Action Alternative is defined as the alternative in which the proposed project activity would not take place.

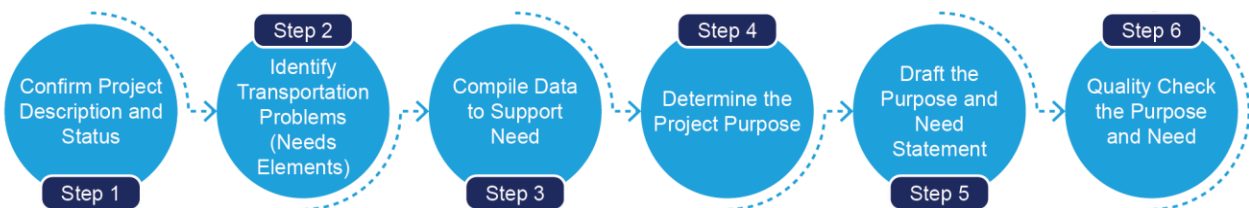
3.4.3 Development of Purpose and Need

Prior to the development of the project planning study, the purpose and need is often conceptual, reflecting regional needs and planning factors and is considered preliminary. While the preliminary purpose and need may be initially defined as a result of statewide/metropolitan planning, the project planning study should confirm and refine the purpose and need based on additional project-specific analyses.

As stated above, the purpose and need statement consists of two parts: the needs section and the purpose statement. The needs section provides the factual basis that supports and justifies the project's purpose. The purpose statement should then clearly and specifically describe the fundamental reasons the project is being proposed, framed as the desired transportation outcome.

The section below presents a practical, repeatable process for developing a project-specific purpose and need statement as part of Project Planning Studies.

Figure 3.8 Steps to Develop a Project Purpose and Need



3.4.3.1 Step 1 – Confirm Project Description and Status

◆ Review planning documents

- Confirm that the project addresses identified needs and is consistent with statewide, regional, and local long-range planning documents.

◆ Develop or confirm project description

- Limits (logical termini), modes, phases, and general scope of the project.
- Any segmentation and implementation strategy.

◆ Summarize project status

- Where the project stands in Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), and MPO/Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) Prioritized Project List
- Funding status for Design, ROW, and Construction.
- Prior actions taken (studies, decisions, analyses).

Key Sources for Planning Documents

- ◆ MPO/TPO LRTP (Cost Feasible Plans)
- ◆ TIP and STIP
- ◆ Florida Transportation Plan (FTP)
- ◆ Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) Cost Feasible Plan
- ◆ Corridor/subarea plans

This information forms the basis of the **project status** portion of the purpose and need statement and demonstrates that the project is a regional and local priority. This general information on project status to support the development of the purpose and need statement is obtained from coordination with the FDOT District Planning Office and other MPO/TPO or local government partners.

3.4.3.2 Step 2 – Identify Transportation Problems (Needs Elements)

Using planning data, analyses, and transportation plans can help identify problems that may explain the need for the proposed project. The following list includes common transportation needs identified in the

PD&E Manual, Part 2, Chapter 1, Project Description, Purpose and Need, and Planning

Consistency to be considered. Questions to consider for each need are also included.

- ◆ **System Linkage** - Is this facility a critical connection in the local, regional, or statewide network? Does it connect to SIS facilities, transit hubs, ports, or intermodal centers?
- ◆ **Capacity** - Is the current facility unable to accommodate existing or forecasted traffic? What are existing and projected level of service (LOS)? Are there operational bottlenecks?
- ◆ **Transportation Demand** - Do forecasts (population, employment, freight) indicate a need to modify the facility or network?
- ◆ **Legislation** - Are there federal, state, or local requirements (e.g., ADA, safety performance, environmental regulations) that must be addressed?
- ◆ **Social Demands or Economic Development** - Are new or planned land uses, employment centers, schools, or other traffic generators creating additional demand?
- ◆ **Modal Interrelationships** - Is the project needed to support or integrate with other modes (transit, bicycle/pedestrian, freight, port, rail, airports)?
- ◆ **Safety** - Is there an acute safety problem along the corridor/in the area? Are crash rates higher than statewide averages? Are there patterns (e.g., angle crashes at intersections, run off road, pedestrian injuries)? Are there known high-hazard locations?
- ◆ **Roadway Deficiencies** - Are there substandard geometrics, inadequate typical sections, deficient bridges, poor pavement, or drainage issues?
- ◆ **Access** - Are access point locations, density, or design affecting safety or operations? Are development pressures requiring access management changes?
- ◆ **Maintenance** - Do existing transportation facilities require additional maintenance investment to sustain desired performance levels?

For more detailed guidance regarding these categories, refer to the **PD&E Manual Part 2, Chapter 1**.

3.4.3.3 Step 3 – Compile Data to Support Need

Technical data and analyses must provide the factual basis for the need. For each problem identified during Step 2, relevant documentation from [Section 3.3 Existing and Future Conditions Analysis](#) can justify the stated needs. The following steps and potential data sources are recommended:

- ◆ **Summarize data developed during the existing and future conditions analysis.** Common sources include:
 - **Traffic operations and capacity:** Current and forecast volumes, LOS, delays, and queues.
 - **Safety:** Crash history, crash rates vs. statewide averages, crash patterns and contributing factors, and Highway Safety Improvement Program data.
 - **Asset/condition:** Condition ratings, hazard events, or known maintenance issues. Pavement Management Information System, Bridge Management System, and roadway and structural ratings.
 - **Transportation demand and growth:** Population and employment forecasts, freight trends, and land use changes.
 - **Multimodal/intermodal:** Transit service, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, freight facilities, airports, ports, and rail.
 - **Environmental and resiliency:** Environmental constraints and opportunities, such as wetland and protected species avoidance, flooding events, and hazard mapping.
 - **Community characteristics:** Demographic data, access to jobs and services, and community features.
 - **Stakeholder and Public Input:** Reveal issues not apparent in quantitative data (e.g., perceived safety, access challenges) and confirm the relative importance of problems.
- ◆ **Identify trends:**
 - Worsening safety, increasing congestion, deterioration, or emerging risks.
- ◆ **Describe consequences of not addressing the problem:**
 - Continued or increased crashes.
 - Increased delay and unreliability.
 - Higher life-cycle costs or likelihood of structural failure.
 - Continued or worsening burdens on distinct communities.
 - Noncompliance with legal mandates.

This process is used to transform raw data into a descriptive narrative of the “need” portion of the purpose and need statement.

3.4.3.4 Step 4 – Determine the Project Purpose

The purpose identifies the core transportation problem that must be addressed for the project to be justified and guides the alternatives that will be developed and evaluated. **Alternatives that do not address the project purpose will be eliminated as not viable.** The purpose typically briefly mentions elements like **safety, capacity, system linkage, or deficient infrastructure** which will then be discussed in detail in the needs section.

Secondary purposes may be identified as project goals and are important considerations that influence design, potentially distinguish between alternatives, and inform the preferred alternative. However, **secondary purposes do not, on their own, justify selecting or eliminating alternatives.** Document primary and secondary purposes explicitly—this will help when writing the purpose and need statement and when screening alternatives later.

3.4.3.5 Step 5 – Draft the Purpose and Need Statement

The need section should begin with the project status including project limits, status of phases and funding documenting the progression of the project towards implementation.

Organize the need section with clear subheadings based on categories identified in the [PD&E Manual, Part 2, Chapter 1, Project Description, Purpose and Need, and Planning Consistency](#) and the project's primary/secondary needs. For each:

- ◆ Open with a concise problem statement.
- ◆ Provide supporting data and analysis, citing sources and timeframes.
- ◆ Explain implications and consequences of no action.

Example Safety Need

Between 2019 and 2023, the 3.5-mile project segment of SR 25 experienced 210 reported crashes, including 15 serious injuries and 4 fatalities. The crash rate of 3.0 crashes per million vehicle miles traveled (MVMT) exceeds the statewide average of 1.5 crashes per MVMT for similar urban four lane facilities. A review of crash reports indicates that 40 percent of all crashes involve rear end or angle collisions at the signalized intersections, frequently associated with short left turn lanes, limited sight distance, and lack of protected turn phases. Pedestrian and bicycle crashes account for 30 percent of serious injury and fatal crashes, reflecting safety concerns for non-motorized users.

If no improvements are made, crash patterns are expected to persist or worsen due to projected traffic growth and increasing pedestrian activity, preventing FDOT from achieving safety performance targets and Vision Zero goals.

Using the identified **primary purpose**, draft a purpose statement that:

- ◆ States the transportation problem to be solved, not a solution.
- ◆ Is specific enough to guide alternatives, but not so narrow that it predetermines a single solution.
- ◆ Reflects applicable planning factors (economic vitality, safety, mobility, environment, system preservation, multimodal connectivity) where they are relevant and supported by data.

Example Purpose Statement

The primary purpose of the project is to improve safety and reduce the frequency and severity of crashes along the 3.5-mile segment of SR 25 between Milepost (MP) 10.0 and MP 13.5, while addressing existing and projected congestion that contributes to operational delays and unreliable travel times. The project also seeks, where feasible, to enhance multimodal connectivity and support access to adjacent residential, commercial, and institutional land uses.

Note that the purpose does **not** say “widen SR 25,” “add turn lanes,” or specify design criteria.

The example purpose statement below describes the primary purpose for increased capacity and system linkage (connectivity) along with secondary purposes of safety, enhanced efficiency, and increased multimodal improvements.

Example Purpose Statement

The purpose of the project is to increase capacity and improve connectivity on US 98. Other project goals include improved safety, enhanced efficiency, and increased multimodal improvements.

3.4.3.6 Step 6 – Quality Check the Purpose and Need

The purpose and need should be clearly written in plain language, succinct and well-defined to set the framework for the development and evaluation of alternatives.

Before finalizing, check that the purpose and need meets the criteria summarized in FDOT guidance:

Purpose – Quality Check

- ◆ Is the purpose a **statement of the transportation problem**, not a specific solution?
- ◆ Is it based on **articulated planning factors** and a planning process?
- ◆ Is it **specific enough** that alternatives can be evaluated against it?
- ◆ Is it not so narrow that it predetermines a **solution**?
- ◆ Does it avoid listing specific **design standards or criteria**?

- ◆ Does it accurately reflect the **primary needs** identified?

Need – Quality Check

- ◆ Is each need element supported by **objective data and analysis**?
- ◆ Are data sources and timeframes identified or readily referenced?
- ◆ Is **project status** (including planning consistency) briefly summarized?
- ◆ Are system linkage, capacity/demand, safety, and other relevant factors addressed?
- ◆ Are consequences of the **no-build** alternative explicitly described?

If any purpose element lacks a clear, data-supported need, either revise the purpose or strengthen the supporting need statement. *Table 3.7 Common Challenges in Developing Purpose and Need* describes common pitfalls when developing purpose and need and suggested solutions for fixing them.

Table 3.7 Common Challenges in Developing Purpose and Need

Challenge	Example	Solution
Solution Driven Purpose Statements	"The purpose of the project is to construct a new interchange at I-95 and XYZ Road."	Reframe in terms of transportation problems (e.g., safety, congestion, access) rather than as a construction solution. <i>Revised Example: "The primary purpose of the project is to improve safety, reduce congestion, and improve system linkage at the existing intersection of I-95 and XYZ Road by addressing operational deficiencies and inadequate access for regional traffic."</i>
Overly Broad or Vague Purpose	"The purpose of the project is to improve transportation in the area."	Specify the transportation problems based on data (safety, congestion, reliability, access, etc.). <i>Revised Example: "The purpose of the project is to improve safety and reduce recurring peak period congestion along SR 7 between MP 3.0 and MP 7.5, while maintaining access to adjacent land uses and supporting reliable movement of people and freight."</i>
Purpose Not Supported by Need	Purpose includes "improve freight movement," but the need section has no freight data or discussion.	Either (1) add freight data and analysis that demonstrates a freight mobility problem, or (2) remove or downgrade the freight element (e.g., make it a secondary objective if only qualitatively supported).
Omission of Project Status	Need section is silent on project status, LRTP/TIP references, or funding phases.	Summarize project status and planning consistency per PD&E Manual Part 2, Chapter 1 , including: • LRTP and TIP references (or STIP and FTP in non-metropolitan areas). • Project limits, scope, phases, costs, and funding status. • Description of any segmentation and implementation timeline.

3.4.4 Summary

A strong, defensible purpose and need statement:

- ◆ Is **project-specific** and grounded in FDOT's transportation needs framework.
- ◆ Evolves logically from the **planning process** through ETDM and PD&E.
- ◆ Provides a **clear, data-supported description** of the transportation problems to be addressed.
- ◆ Guides the **development and evaluation of alternatives** without prescribing a predetermined solution.

By following the step-by-step approach in this chapter and using FDOT's existing guidance, such as the PD&E Manual, purpose and need statements can be developed that support efficient project development, meet PEL requirements for adoption into the PD&E phase, withstand technical and legal scrutiny, and help maintain consistency across all phases of the project.

3.5 Public Involvement & Agency Coordination

Public involvement and agency coordination should be integrated throughout the project planning process to ensure the planning study is grounded in local context, informed by community values and partner agency considerations, and produces transparent documentation that can be carried forward into subsequent project development phases. Meaningful public and agency engagement is particularly integral to confirming the transportation problem, aligning identified needs and issues based on community values and regional priorities. This section outlines how a planning project's engagement efforts can be structured, supported, and scaled to identify the project's problem and meet PEL requirements, if applicable. It is intended to guide the identification of effective engagement strategies and the application of best practices that are appropriate to a project's context, decision needs, and level of risk. Emphasis is placed on ensuring engagement is strategically aligned with FDOT's Community Engagement Policy located on the [FDOT Community Engagement website](#), as well as applicable documentation and coordination requirements, particularly for studies intended to meet PEL requirements.

Key principles and objectives when conducting public involvement and agency coordination include the following:

- ◆ **Build shared understanding:** Identify and document community concerns, environmental constraints, permitting considerations, ROW risks, and potential approaches for addressing issues as early as practicable.
- ◆ **Inform decision-making:** Gather input that helps define needs, develop purpose and needs, and identify relevant data sources.
- ◆ **Coordinate across agencies and jurisdictions:** Align with partner plans, policies, and projects; confirm roles and responsibilities; and identify decisions that must be made in later phases.

3.5.1 Effective Engagement Strategies

Effective engagement strategies are tailored to the study context, focus on stakeholders who have an interest in or could be affected by the project, and create timely opportunities for input before key decisions are made and throughout the project lifecycle. Proven engagement strategies include:

- ◆ **Individual or small group meetings** with key stakeholders such as local governments, public transportation agencies, freight operators, community organizations, and major landowners.
- ◆ **Coordination with MPOs and other regional planning agencies** to align assumptions, identify overlapping initiatives, and confirm consistency with adopted plans.
- ◆ **Targeted outreach** to communities directly affected by existing and potential conditions (e.g., neighborhoods experiencing cut-through traffic or freight corridors near residential areas) to understand localized concerns and priorities.

- ◆ **Project websites and online information hubs** that provide accessible, up-to-date project information and offer opportunities for public comment outside of scheduled meetings.
- ◆ **Social media and digital communication tools** to increase awareness, direct stakeholders to project information, and reach audiences who may not engage through traditional meetings.
- ◆ **Surveys and polls** (used independently or alongside meetings) to collect feedback on issues, priorities, or alternatives from a broader audience.
- ◆ Participation in **community events, pop-up meetings, or other opportunities to meet people where they already gather** to lower barriers to participation, particularly for communities that may be underrepresented in traditional engagement settings.
- ◆ **Direct notification and outreach, such as mailed notices or targeted communications**, to ensure affected property owners, residents, and stakeholders are aware of opportunities to participate.

Stakeholders and coordination needs vary by context. Community characteristics and key stakeholder identification began during the existing and future conditions analysis as described in [Table 3.5 Community Characteristics and Key Stakeholders Analysis and Data](#). To build on this data and develop engagement strategies, [Table 3.8 Stakeholder Groups and Engagement Outcomes](#) summarizes common stakeholder groups and examples of the types of outcomes engagement can support during project planning. The [FDOT Public Involvement Handbook](#) provides additional details on federal and state public involvement requirements, FDOT procedures, and guidance on identifying stakeholders and conducting outreach through all phases of the project development process.

Table 3.8 Stakeholder Groups and Engagement Outcomes

Stakeholder Group	Intended Engagement Outcomes During Problem Definition
Residents, neighborhood groups, corridor users	Confirm needs and priorities, identify local access and safety concerns, understand community values and context, and inform evaluation criteria.
Business, freight, and economic stakeholders	Identify freight routes and operational needs, understand access and circulation issues, identify construction/operations sensitivities, and support evaluation of travel time reliability and economic vitality considerations.
Local governments and MPOs/TPOs	Confirm consistency with adopted plans and policies, coordinate with land use and development assumptions, and align with local multimodal priorities.
Public transportation providers and operators	Identify service needs and constraints, confirm stop locations and operations, evaluate public transportation priority treatments, and understand passenger access and ADA considerations.
Schools, emergency services, and major institutions	Identify access and safety issues, special event or peak period constraints, evacuation/emergency response considerations, and opportunities for coordination on access management and operations.
Environmental/resource and permitting agencies	Identify known environmental constraints and data sources, discuss likely permits and consultation needs, identify potential avoidance and minimization opportunities, and flag issues requiring more detailed analysis in PD&E.
Utilities and railroads (as applicable)	Identify potential conflicts and coordination needs; clarify data availability; inform feasibility, cost risk, and schedule considerations.

3.5.2 Public Involvement to Define the Problem

Early engagement should focus on confirming the planning context, refining the problem statement, understanding community values, educating the public and stakeholders on the purpose of the study, and identifying stakeholders who may be affected by or have influence over the study outcomes. Rather than presenting solutions, outreach at this stage is most effective when framed around listening and gathering information to understand local concerns, validate the preliminary project purpose and need, and identify issues or constraints that could influence later decisions.

The outcome of this step is a shared understanding of the study context and problem, supported by a clear record of how input informed that understanding. Engagement during problem definition should position the study to move forward with clear goals, an appropriate study area, and an engagement approach that reflects the corridor and communities involved.

Table 3.9 Key Aspects of Public Involvement When Defining the Problem

Outreach Priorities	Participants and/or Agency Coordination	Desired Outcomes	Documentation
• Validate the preliminary purpose and need • Understand key issues (safety, congestion, access, freight, public transportation reliability, context and placemaking, etc.) • Identify environmentally sensitive areas • Identify historic concerns or prior commitments • Confirm desired outcomes	• Community members and corridor users • Local governments • MPO/TPO staff • Public transportation providers • Freight and business interests • Emergency services • Schools and major institutions • Advocacy groups • Resource/permitting agencies as appropriate to the setting (including through ETDM coordination when applicable) • For more information, see the FDOT Public Involvement Handbook Chapter 300: Identifying the Public	• Refined study area and context (as described in Section 3.2 Understanding the Planning Context) • Identification of key issues and/or opportunities • Development of preliminary goals and objectives • Engagement plan tailored to the corridor and communities	• Summaries of outreach methods, meeting materials, and input received • Log of stakeholder contacts • Clear record of how input informed the problem definition

3.5.3 Agency Coordination

During project planning, agency coordination involves working with partner agencies and organizations to ensure that proposed transportation solutions are feasible, aligned with adopted plans and policies, and positioned for implementation. **Effective agency coordination early in the process helps identify project champions, clarify roles and responsibilities, and establish communication channels that will be carried forward into subsequent phases.**

Agency coordination can differ from typical public involvement in both purpose and focus. Public involvement typically emphasizes understanding community priorities and context. While agency coordination can also help understand community context, it is also focused on facilitating implementation and interagency alignment. It supports planning level decision-making by clarifying requirements, dependencies, and risks early.

3.5.3.1 Identifying Agency Partners

Identifying appropriate agency partners is a project-specific task that should consider study purpose, geographic setting, anticipated project impacts, and implementation responsibilities. A review of the planning context, prior studies, known regulatory requirements, and potential funding or delivery mechanisms can help to determine which agencies have authority, responsibility, or influence over future project development. For projects where FDOT partners with MPOs, coordination with FDOT District MPO Liaisons is helpful to gather information on important local agency contacts. Early coordination should prioritize agencies whose input may affect alternatives, funding eligibility, operations, or long-term ownership, with the level of coordination scaled to the study's decision needs and implementation risks.

Depending on the study context, agency partners may include:

- ◆ MPOs and TPOs
- ◆ Counties and municipalities
- ◆ Regional planning councils
- ◆ Public transportation providers/agencies
- ◆ State and federal resources and regulatory agencies
- ◆ Freight, port, rail, and aviation agencies or authorities
- ◆ Emergency management and public safety agencies
- ◆ School districts and major institutional partners
- ◆ Utilities, railroads, and other infrastructure owners
- ◆ Economic development organizations
- ◆ Potential funding partners

The level and timing of coordination with each agency should be scaled to the study's decision needs.

More information on agency coordination during alternatives analysis is included in [Chapter 4 Developing and Evaluating Potential Improvements](#).

3.5.4 Additional FDOT Resources

- ◆ **FDOT Community Engagement Policy**: Establishes FDOT's statewide vision and commitment to effective community engagement throughout the project lifecycle.
- ◆ **FDOT Public Involvement Handbook**: Primary reference for public involvement requirements, methods, documentation practices, and accessibility considerations.
- ◆ **FDOT ETDM Manual**: Reference for ETDM applicability, screening steps (planning and programming screens), and use of the EST to support early and continuous agency coordination.
- ◆ **FDOT PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 11, Public Involvement**: Establishes public involvement requirements and procedures during the PD&E phase, including development of Public Involvement Plans, identification of affected communities and stakeholders, outreach activities, and public involvement expectations based on class of action and environmental document type.

- ◆ **FDOT PD&E Manual, Part 2, Chapter 1, Project Description, Purpose and Need, and Planning Consistency:** Provides guidance on developing and documenting the project description, purpose and need, and planning consistency for the project prior to and during the PD&E phase.
- ◆ **FDOT Design Manual, Part 1, Chapter 104, Public Involvement:** Provides guidance for public involvement during the design phase, focusing on carrying forward commitments made in earlier phases, addressing community impacts identified during design, and developing Community Awareness Plans.